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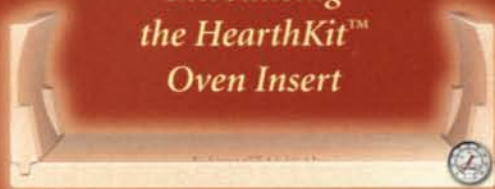
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RECIPE FOLDOUTS

18g COVER STORY:

Holiday Cookies

15 cookie recipes
with tips on mixing,
baking, decorating,
storing, and mailing

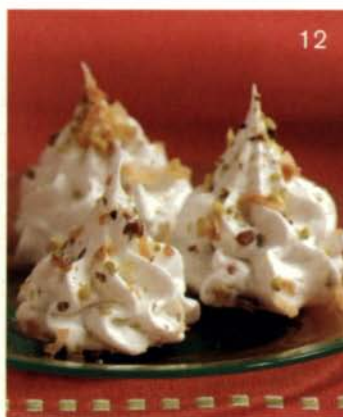


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ELAINE KHOSROVA ("Holiday Cookies," p. 18G) is a trained pastry chef and a former food editor for *Country Living* and other national magazines. Her past cookie projects include baking and decorating enough cookies to cover a 12-foot-tall Christmas tree. "I had a mean cramp in my hand, but the tree looked delicious," Elaine reports. Now a food writer and recipe developer living in New York's Hudson Valley, she also creates custom wedding cakes.

JOANNE CHANG ("Ingredients," p. 22) uses butter, vanilla, and brown sugar to bake up irresistible sweets six days a week (she takes Sundays off) at her bakery and café, Flour, in Boston's South End. Before opening her bakery last year, she worked as a pastry chef for an impressive lineup of restaurants and bakeries, including Rialto in Cambridge and Payard Pâtisserie in New York City.

In her 30 years working in the food business in California, **CAROLYN WEIL** ("Holiday Pies," p. 38) has worked in three-star restaurants and owned a bakery for a decade. She now spends her time teaching and writing, with the goal of making baking approachable to the home cook. Carolyn is a contributor to *The Baker's Dozen Cookbook* and is looking forward to the publication of Williams-Sonoma's *Pies & Tarts* in the spring of 2003.

Regular readers of *Fine Cooking* will recognize **ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE** ("Coffee Cakes," p. 44; "Make & Freeze Desserts," p. 50; "Chocolate Mousse Cake," p. 66) as a contributing editor and our resident pastry and dessert guru. Abby earned her stripes as a pastry chef both in the United States and in France. "I trained in the French classic tradition and will never

forget those roots, but I've come to appreciate how to get spectacular results with a bit of streamlining," she says. Abby is the author of *Great Fruit Desserts*, *The Kid's Cookbook*, and Williams-Sonoma's *Dessert*. She also wrote the New England and mid-Atlantic portions of *Savoring America*.

MARTHA HOLMBERG learned to make the delicious French appetizer called gougères (p. 48) when she was an intern at the Burgundy campus of La Varenne cooking school. She likes to give them an American twist by using pecans and Cheddar instead of the traditional Gruyère. Martha is the editor in chief of *Fine Cooking*.

Challah (p. 55) is a subject that's both special and familiar to **MAGGIE GLEZER**—she bakes it for her family every week. Maggie nabbed a James Beard award in 2001 for her book, *Artisan Baking Across America*, and she's now at work on a book about challah and other Jewish ceremonial breads.

KATHLEEN WEBER's passion for rustic regional foods and for preserving the past fueled her fascination with biscotti (p. 58). Kathleen, her husband, Ed, and their son and daughter-in-law, Aaron and Linda, own and operate Della Fattoria, a renowned artisan bakery that sells hand-crafted hearth breads to some of northern California's finest restaurants and food shops.

JUSTIN SCHWARTZ ("Gearing Up for Cookie Baking," p. 62) is a former cookbook editor, having published baking books with notable pastry chefs such as Wayne Harley Brachman and Marcel Desaulniers. He is now a freelance food writer, editor, and photography art director.

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Welcome to our first Holiday Baking issue

In late July, when it was 95 degrees for days here in Connecticut, I walked into the test kitchen to find an amazing sight: On every last horizontal surface were trays and trays and *trays* of Christmas cookies: all the decorated sugar cookies, bar cookies, slice-and-bakes, shaped cookies, and drop cookies from our fabulous eight-page foldout in this issue, plus gorgeous biscotti, cute meringue kisses, and even a few cocoa-dusted truffles. As an avid cookie muncher, I thought, "Nirvana," until Steve, our art director, issued a terse warning: "Don't

eat a *single* cookie. You never know which ones will be perfect for the cover photo."

So there they sat, as we photographed them for the cover, the foldout, the feature stories, until the scene was no longer tempting but frankly, well, freaky. And highly annoying to Jennifer, our test kitchen manager, and Rob, our intern, who ducked and dodged the trays as they continued their regular recipe testing during the heat wave.

But the weather in New England moves quickly and has a powerful effect on your mood. Just weeks later, as we send the issue to the printer, the breeze has a cool bite and the clouds are more insistent, and the notion of filling the kitchen with the fragrance of cinnamon and toasted nuts and butter browning in the oven is pretty appealing. As we

start planning which recipes we're going to make at home, we're also wondering which will become your favorites.

We're so pleased to present this first special issue on holiday baking. The recipes will take you from early fall entertaining (gougères and other appetizers) through Thanksgiving—with three incredible pies—and deep into Hanukkah, Christmas, and New Year's, with scads of yummy cookies, sophisticated biscotti, coffee cakes for holiday mornings, tender challah, a chocolate soufflé that you can actually make ahead and freeze, and a grand finale chocolate mousse cake with three options for pretty decorations.

Plus, we're including more ways to decorate and wrap your desserts, in two special departments: Wrapping It Up and Finishing Touches. And be sure to read Jennifer's advice on measuring in From Our Test Kitchen—precision in baking really counts.

—Martha Holmberg,
editor in chief

And on the Web...

We've gathered many of our favorite holiday baking recipes into a special spot on our Web site, along with technique classes on cakes and pie crusts, videos that will show you the way to perfect pies, and more. Visit the site at www.finecooking.com.



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meringue cookies

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

I first learned to make meringues in Paris some twenty years ago. And while I've modified the recipe somewhat, it's still one I use often. I love whipping egg whites and sugar into billowy clouds that bake into lighter-than-air crisp confections. I can pipe different shapes and add flavorings as I please, and I can keep the meringues for weeks in airtight containers.

To make a meringue, I use about twice as much sugar as egg whites. That may seem like a lot of sugar, but you need it to stabilize the whites and give them structure. During long baking at a low temperature, the water in the meringue slowly evaporates, leaving the cookie light and crisp all the way through. For the best texture and the lightest meringue, I use a mix of superfine sugar (it dissolves better than granulated) and confectioners' sugar (the cornstarch in it helps to ensure an especially light meringue).



Simple steps for successful meringues

Before you start, remember two important things. First, your bowl and beater should be impeccably clean. Any speck of grease will keep the egg whites from expanding properly. A quick rinse with a little white vinegar and some water will do the trick. Be sure to dry the equipment well. Second, your ingredients should be at room temperature to get the best volume out of your meringue. Since it's easier to separate whites from yolks when they're cold, go ahead and separate your eggs straight out of the

refrigerator. Then let your whites warm to room temperature in a bowl, or put the bowl over warm water to speed the process.



1 Add a little cream of tartar to your egg whites before you begin mixing. It will strengthen the whites and help to maintain the structure of your meringues.

One note: Don't try to make meringues on a very humid day. The humidity can prevent the meringues from ever getting crisp.



2 When the whites are very foamy—almost at the stage where they form soft, floppy peaks—begin adding the sugar gradually. Turn up the speed on the mixer as you add the sugar.

3 Since the sugar helps stabilize the egg whites, this is one time when you don't have to be cautious about beating—you want to whip the mixture until glossy, firm peaks form. At this point, stir in the vanilla and the chopped nuts.



4 Fit a pastry bag with a wide star tip. Twist the bag slightly just over the tip and stuff the twist into the tip. Fold the bag over one hand and spoon the meringue into it with a rubber spatula. Fill the bag about halfway and twist it shut. Untwist the part over the tip and squeeze out some meringue to remove any air bubbles.



Pistachio Meringues with Toasted Coconut

Yields about 40 kisses.

If you can't find superfine sugar, pulse granulated sugar in a food processor to a fine grind; measure after grinding. Pistachios and coconut are one of my favorite meringue flavoring combinations, but feel free to substitute with other additions. Fold in any ground nut, or even tiny chocolate morsels, if you like.

3 ounces ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) confectioners' sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup superfine sugar

Pinch table salt

4 large egg whites, at room temperature

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cream of tartar

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup unsalted shelled pistachios, chopped medium fine

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup shredded unsweetened coconut, lightly toasted

3 tablespoons finely chopped pistachios for garnish (optional)

Arrange oven racks in the top third and bottom third of the oven. Heat the oven to 175°F. Line a large heavy baking sheet with parchment. Sift together the confectioners' sugar, superfine sugar, and salt.

With an electric mixer fitted with the wire whisk, combine the egg whites and cream of tartar. Begin mixing on medium-low speed until frothy. Increase the speed to medium high and beat until the whites form soft peaks. Continue beating while gradually sprinkling in the sifted sugars. When all the sugar is added, increase speed to high and whip until firm, glossy peaks form. Add the vanilla and the $\frac{1}{3}$ cup pistachios and beat just until blended, about 10 seconds.

Spoon about half of the meringue into a large pastry bag fitted with a large (#8) star tip. Pipe shapes as you like—see the photos at right (for kisses, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and about 2 inches from tip to base)—onto the prepared baking sheet, about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart. If the tip gets clogged with a nut, use the back of a small knife or spoon to pry open the points of the star tip slightly and the nut will wiggle out. Sprinkle the toasted coconut over the meringues along with a dusting of pistachios, if you like.

Bake the meringues until dried and crisp but not browned, about 3 hours. Turn off the oven (leave the door shut) and let the meringues sit in the oven for about 1 hour. Remove them from the oven and gently lift the meringues off the parchment. Serve immediately or store in an airtight container for up to a month.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

Piping meringue shapes

After filling your pastry bag, you're ready to pipe and bake. To pipe, squeeze gently with the hand that holds the top of the bag. Use your other hand to guide the tip. Practice piping on a sheet of parchment, and then line baking sheets with parchment and pipe shapes until you've used all the meringue. This meringue makes lovely little cookies in a variety of sizes and shapes. Don't worry if the shapes aren't perfect—bake them all anyway; they'll be delicious. If you're aiming for consistency, use a template and a pencil to draw circles or other shapes on the parchment to guide your piping.



Kisses

Hold the bag perpendicular to the pan and squeeze gently from the top of the bag. Lift the bag straight up while releasing pressure to let a peak form.

Christmas trees

Pipe as if you were making kisses. After the first pipe, release pressure, but instead of removing the bag, push it ever so slightly back into the base, and squeeze another, slightly smaller kiss on top; if you like, make a third, even smaller layer (see the photo at left).



Ladyfingers

Gently pipe ladyfinger shapes with even pressure, lifting the tip slightly as you finish. Use ladyfingers to decorate cakes or make ladyfinger sandwiches from two to serve with ice cream.



Nests

Pipe a round of meringue as the base for a nest; then pipe the sides. Fill cup-size nests with a winter fruit compote or a scoop of ice cream and a drizzle of chocolate sauce.

Electronic kitchen scales

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

We ran a series of tests on nine widely available scales, evaluating their accuracy and ease of use. Overall design was also taken into consideration. In the end, four stood out.

Owning a kitchen scale is taking a giant step in the direction of becoming a better cook. Measuring by weight is far more exact than measuring by volume (i.e., with measuring cups). This kind of precision makes all the difference when it comes to baking, which is as much a science as it is an art. (All *Fine Cooking* baking recipes list critical dry ingredients by both weight and volume.)

There are two types of kitchen scales, mechanical and electronic. Because electronic scales tend to be more accurate (and more user- and storage-friendly), we focused our product evaluation on this type. We tested for accuracy using standardized weights ranging from 10 to 1,000 grams. In the end, our choices came down to accuracy first, as well as function and design smarts.

What to look for in an electronic kitchen scale

Many features on an electronic kitchen scale can make all the difference to the cook.

Tare: Also often called “add-and-weigh,” tare lets you set the display to zero after adding weight (such as a bowl or an ingredient) to the scale. This is handy if you’ve turned on the scale before setting an empty bowl on the platform, or if you’ve measured one ingredient and want to measure another without having to keep track of the math.

Automatic shutoff: After a set number of minutes, many machines shut off on their own, a major battery saver. We liked scales that stayed on for at least two minutes before shutting off.

Capacity: Most electronic scales are made to measure up to either 5 or 11 pounds of weight. For most home baking, a capacity of 4 or 5 pounds is plenty.

Increments: The most precise scales measure in increments of as little as $\frac{1}{8}$ ounce (about 1 teaspoon flour). Large-capacity scales will typically weigh at $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce increments up to a certain weight and then weigh in larger increments beyond that. Most scales measure in both grams and pounds/ounces. Europeans and professional pastry chefs tend to measure by the gram.

Platform size: The platform should accommodate a variety of bowl sizes, including relatively large ones, without covering up the display panel. For this reason, we were not fans of scales that had the display set in the platform. Better that the display sit below and project well out from the platform.

Display size: The bigger the numbers, the easier they are to read.

Other details to consider: How fast does it read the weight? How easy is it to wipe clean and to store?

Best All-Around



Salter Electronic Kitchen Scale with Glass Platform

model 1001 SVDR

\$60

www.salterhousewares.com

BASIC FEATURES:

Capacity: 11 pounds

Increments: $\frac{1}{8}$ ounce up to 5 pounds;
 $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce over 5 pounds

Automatic shutoff: after 1 minute at zero; after another 3 minutes once weight is added

Tare feature: yes

Display size: 11 millimeters

PROS: The most accurate scale in the testing. Picks up a reading with as little as 1 teaspoon flour. Easy-to-clean, stain-resistant glass platform and brushed silver base. Compact.

CONS: Readout occasionally flip-flops with small increments. (At one moment it might read 5 pounds $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce, and then jump to 5 pounds 1 ounce and back again.)

(Continued)

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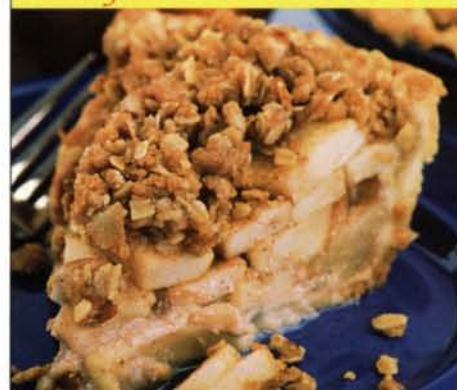
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Recipe Contest Winner!



Almond Apple Crumb Pie

Make it in 25 minutes.

Bake it in 55 minutes.

Ingredients:

- 1 box Odense Pure Almond Paste
- 1 unbaked 9" pie crust
- 5 baking apples, peeled, cored and sliced (about 5 cups)
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon, divided
- 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- 1/2 cup uncooked oats
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 6 tbsp. cold butter, in 1/2" pieces
- 1/4 cup chopped almonds

Preparation: ~ Preheat oven to 375°. ~ Roll Almond Paste between 2 sheets of wax paper to form an 8-9 inch circle. ~ Press rolled Almond Paste into the bottom of unbaked pie crust. ~ In a bowl, combine apples, sugar and 1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon. ~ Pour into pie shell. ~ In a bowl, combine remaining cinnamon, flour, oats, brown sugar and almonds. ~ Cut butter into flour mixture until crumbs are formed. ~ Spoon crumb mixture evenly over apples. ~ Bake at 375° for 55 minutes.



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www.polderinc.com

BASIC FEATURES:

Capacity: 4 pounds 6½ ounces
Increments: ⅛ ounce
Automatic shutoff: after 1½ minutes at zero; after another 1½ minutes once weight is added
Tare feature: yes
Display size: 11 millimeters

PROS: Who can argue with having another timer on hand? Compact. Mostly accurate (it strayed by 1 to 2 grams—a miniscule amount) at higher weights.

CONS: Plastic construction. The display scrolls up and down, making the reading-response time slow. Timer and scale don't work simultaneously.

Most Savvy



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BASIC FEATURES:

Capacity: 4 pounds 6 ounces (an 11-pound capacity scale is also available)
Increments: ½ ounce up to 2 pounds 3 ounces; ⅛ ounce above 2 pounds 3 ounces
Automatic shutoff: after 2 minutes at zero; after another 2 minutes once weight is added
Tare feature: yes
Display size: 15 millimeters

PROS: Base can be cleaned under running water. Overload protection (if too much weight is added, the scale's calibration won't be knocked off kilter). One-button operation: press for on, press again for tare, hold down to shut off (or use automatic shutoff).

CONS: Steep price. The switch from pounds/ounces to grams is embedded on the underside of the base and requires you to insert a pointed object, like a pencil tip, to flip it.

Large Capacity



Terraillon Professional model BM 1002

\$100

678-229-4003

BASIC FEATURES:

Capacity: 22 pounds
Increments: ⅛ ounce up to 2.2 pounds; ¼ ounce up to 8.8 pounds; ½ ounce up to 22 pounds
Automatic shutoff: after 2 minutes at zero; after another 2 minutes once weight is added
Tare feature: yes
Display size: 15 millimeters

PROS: Large capacity. Stainless-steel platform is removable for easy cleanup. If you overload the scale, the display will indicate the error ("EEEE") so that you know to remove the excess weight immediately. Low-battery indicator.

CONS: Pound/kilogram switch is located on the underside of the base. At higher weights, it can't measure with as much precision.

The way to weigh: getting the most from your scale

- ❖ Measure ingredients separately. That way, if you add too much of one, it isn't mixed in with other ingredients.
- ❖ We found that scales don't always pick up on weight when it's added in small amounts, such as a teaspoon of flour at a time. So don't be shy. It's better to add more of an ingredient than you need and pull it away in small amounts than to add a little bit at a time.
- ❖ Always weigh on a hard, flat surface that doesn't shake or wobble.
- ❖ If you know your scale is about to automatically shut off and you want it to stay on, press on the scale's platform. This resets the automatic shutoff timer on most models.
- ❖ For baking, use your scale to measure flour. You'll get much more consistent results over using measuring cups. (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 72).
- ❖ Other ingredients that we recommend be weighed: starches, cocoa powder, and confectioners' sugar; nuts (when they're a major part of the recipe, such as in a nut cake); fresh fruit, like apples for a cake or pie; butter, shortening, and peanut butter; bulky savory items that are too awkward to fit snugly into a measuring cup.
- ❖ Ingredients that are typically used in small quantities, such as baking powder, yeast, or salt, are best measured by volume. (Most scales lack the precision to measure such small quantities.)

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large. ♦

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Q I just bought a new oven that has a convection feature. As an avid cookie-baker, I was wondering if it's all right to use convection heat when making cookies. Do I need to lower the heat to compensate?

—Sara Campos, via e-mail

A **Elinor Klivans responds:** Convection heat is perfect for producing batch after batch of evenly baked cookies. Its great virtue—even heat throughout the oven—produces nicely browned cookie bottoms and edges.

A convection oven has a fan that circulates air and creates uniform heat in the oven. Since items placed in the top or back of the oven cook at the same rate as those in the bottom or front, convection heat allows you to bake two sheets of cookies together without rearranging them during baking, as you would have to do in a conventional oven.

When baking with a convection oven, I follow the recipe's directions and its baking times, but I generally reduce the baking temperature by about 25°F to compensate for the strength of the convection heat. The manufacturer's booklet may advise specific temperature suggestions for your oven, but, if not, start with this 25°F reduction and try a few test batches to see what works best.

*Elinor Klivans is the author of **Fearless Baking: Over 100 Recipes That Anyone Can Make**.*

Do you have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Q Many pie recipes recommend chilling the crust prior to baking. My favorite pie plates are all made of Pyrex. Will they crack if I transfer them directly from the refrigerator to the hot oven?

—Linda Avidan, via e-mail

A **Eiron Jones responds:** Pyrex was made to withstand most types of temperature fluctuations when it was first designed for glass railroad lanterns in the early 1900s. The glass cookware can go directly from the refrigerator or freezer to a microwave or into a hot conventional oven without fear of cracking.

But while you can transfer Pyrex from the refrigerator to the oven, you'll want to let it cool slightly before washing. Additionally, Pyrex should never be used on top of the stove, under a broiler, in a toaster oven, or under a pilot light.

To clean Pyrex cookware, allow the glass to cool and then soak it. If scouring is necessary, use only plastic or nylon cleaning pads with nonabrasive cleansers.

Eiron Jones is a corporate communications specialist at World Kitchen, Inc., makers of Pyrex.

Q What is baking ammonia?

—“Chiffonade Chef,” via e-mail

A **Karen Pontius responds:** Before baking powder or baking soda was common, European bakers used baking ammonia, a traditional leavening agent, to perform the same tasks as its modern counterparts: to add gases to baked products that would increase volume and change shape and texture. At that time, baking ammonia was also called hartshorn, a reference to the agent's original source, deer antlers.

Baking ammonia is still used today, although it does present drawbacks for bakers, most notably because of its ammonia properties. Baking ammonia is a white crystalline powder that smells strongly of ammonia, and when it's activated with heat (above 140°F) and moisture, the powder releases carbon dioxide, ammonia gas, and water. As the ammonia gas can only be cooked off in small products, it isn't appealing to use baking ammonia in larger items like cakes; the ammonia gas wouldn't be able to evaporate sufficiently, and the strong odor would remain.

For this reason, baking ammonia is best used in recipes for small, thin baked goods like cookies and crackers, where it helps produce an especially crisp and light texture. Baking ammonia is also used frequently in cream puffs because it releases gases quickly, which helps dry out the insides of the pastry.

Store baking ammonia in an airtight container in a cool place. If baking ammonia is exposed to air during storage, it may absorb moisture and lose some of its leavening power.

Karen Pontius is the owner of Sutton's Bay Trading Company in Fort Wayne, Indiana. ♦

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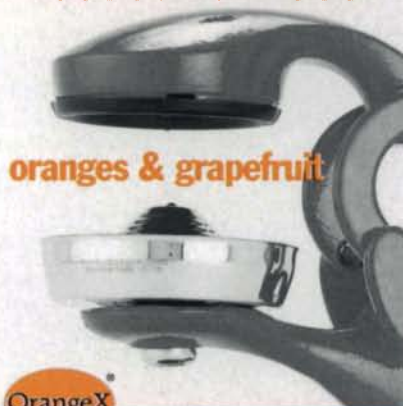
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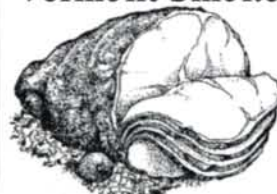
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How to make whipped cream something special

BY THE FINE COOKING STAFF

Whipped cream can be much more than an ivory dollop, and, with a little creativity, it can help the simplest desserts look spectacular. The following ideas use plain whipped cream as their base but add

twists of flavor, color, and texture to give excitement and an extra layer of deliciousness to all kinds of desserts.

The key to perfect whipped cream decorations is not to overwhip the cream—it should hold a shape, but the peaks that form when you lift the beaters should still droop slightly. Going all the way to firm peaks will produce a stiff, slightly curdled cream that doesn't take on a graceful shape.

Create a custom cream

You can use just one of the following ideas, or a combination. Just keep in mind how the flavors of your decoration will work with the flavors of the dessert.

Flavor it: To start, play with adding extracts (such as vanilla, almond, or peppermint) or spirits—brandy, rum, or bourbon work well. And try different sugars and

BROWN-SUGAR BRANDY CREAM:

Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy or whipping cream with 2 packed tablespoons dark brown sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract, and 1 teaspoon brandy or rum. Whip until blended and the cream forms soft peaks that hold a shape.

Caramel Squiggles

Yield varies with size.

We've adapted this idea from Gale Gand, the pastry chef at Tru in Chicago.

2 cups granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

Line a baking sheet with foil, smooth it out, and grease it lightly with vegetable oil.

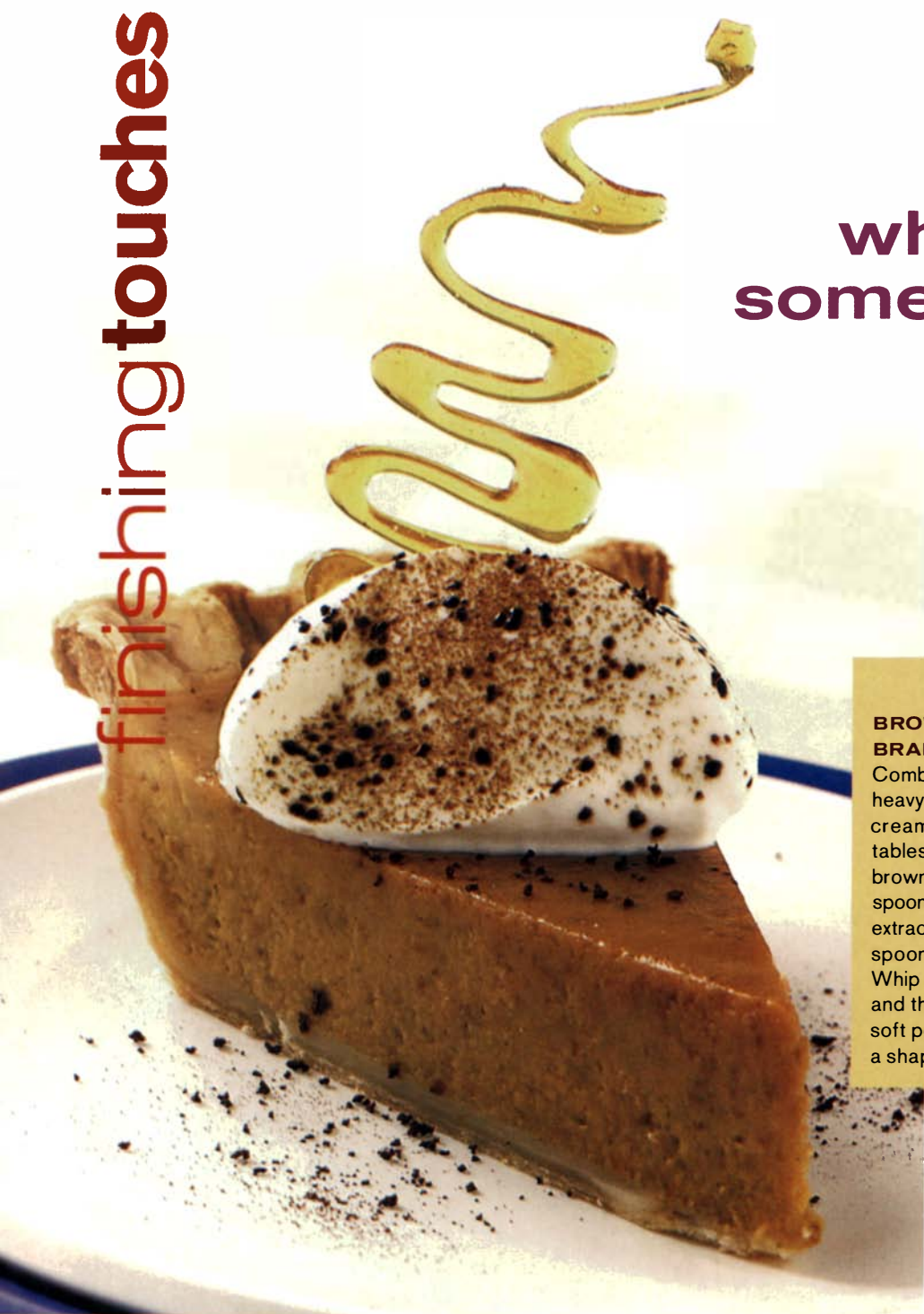
Have a large pan of water and a dessertspoon ready.

In a medium saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring just until the sugar is dissolved but no more. When the sugar darkens to a medium amber, stop the cooking by carefully setting the bottom of the pan in the water.

Stir the caramel to cool it slightly and then use the spoon to drizzle the caramel on the foil, about 1 tablespoon at a time, making zigzags, swirls, spirals, and other shapes. If the caramel gets too thick, reheat it gently. After you've made a half dozen shapes or so, let them cool and test that the caramel

is solid. If the squiggles are still syrupy and you can't peel them from the foil, cook the caramel to a slightly darker shade of amber and try again.

You can make these up to a day ahead, but keep the squiggles at room temperature on the oiled foil, covered with another piece of oiled foil until ready to use.





CHOCOLATE WHIPPED CREAM:

Melt 2 ounces good-quality semi-sweet chocolate. Whip $\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy or whipping cream with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract and a small pinch of salt until it forms very soft peaks. By hand, whisk in the melted chocolate until blended and the cream forms soft peaks that hold a shape.



FRUIT CREAM:

Whip $\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy or whipping cream to soft peaks. Fold in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lightly sweetened puréed and strained fresh or frozen fruit (berries and mangos work well; start with about 1 cup). Whisk a bit until the cream holds a shape.

syrups, such as honey, maple syrup, or molasses, or a combination, as in the Brown-Sugar Brandy Cream at left. You can also fold in ingredients like melted chocolate, fruit purées, or finely crushed toffee.

Sprinkle it: Next, jazz up the look with a dusting of crushed instant coffee granules, chocolate shavings, a fine julienne of blanched citrus zest, chopped nuts, or even crushed peppermint candies.

Dress it up: For a bigger “statement,” garnish the cream with sprigs of mint or tiny edible flowers and small berries or champagne grapes. And for a dazzling flourish that’s fun to eat, make a caramel squiggle (recipe at left) to tuck into the cream. ♦

Tips for perfectly whipped cream

- ❖ Don’t use ultrapasteurized cream, if possible. It overwhips easily, doesn’t get as thick or hold up as well, and has a slightly cooked taste.
- ❖ When close to soft peaks, stop the mixer and finish whisking by hand to avoid overwhipping.
- ❖ If the cream gets too stiff or curdled, fold in a little un-whipped cream to soften it.

Note: Three-quarters cup whipping or heavy cream will yield about 2 cups whipped cream—enough to garnish 10 to 12 desserts.



A Baker's Pantry

BY JOANNE CHANG

In baking, it's often the simplest ingredients that deliver greatness. Butter, vanilla, and brown sugar are perfect examples. Yet it's easy to take these pantry standards for granted, to overlook the ins and outs of when to use them, how to use them, and in which form. You'll find the answers here, along with lots of handy tips and techniques and a sure-to-please caramel sauce recipe that combines all three.

Brown sugar makes cookies soft and chewy. It helps cakes and pastries stay moist. And it gives a warm spiciness and a hint of caramel essence that its white counterpart can't offer. The secret behind this ingredient: molasses.

Originally made from semi-refined sugar that still had some of the natural molasses left in it, brown sugar is now typically made by spraying white sugar with molasses.

Brown sugar, however, isn't necessarily a practical substitute for white sugar—particularly when creaming sugar with butter. White sugar crystals are relatively large and sharp, making them great at cutting through butter to create air pockets that make your baked goods light and tender. Brown sugar crystals are smaller, softer, and, hence, less effective at creaming.

❖ Remember to press brown sugar into the cup when measuring. Simply scooping it up will give you a lot of air along with the sugar, and an inconsistent measure.

❖ Sometimes bits of brown sugar harden into small nibs. Unless you're dissolving the sugar by mixing it into a liquid or melting it, press it through a sieve to get rid of the hard nibs so they don't create pockets of crunchy sugar bits—tasty, but usually not ideal.



Light vs. dark: Is there a difference? Dark brown and light brown sugars are virtually interchangeable in recipes, but dark contains more molasses, so it will give a deeper, spicier flavor.

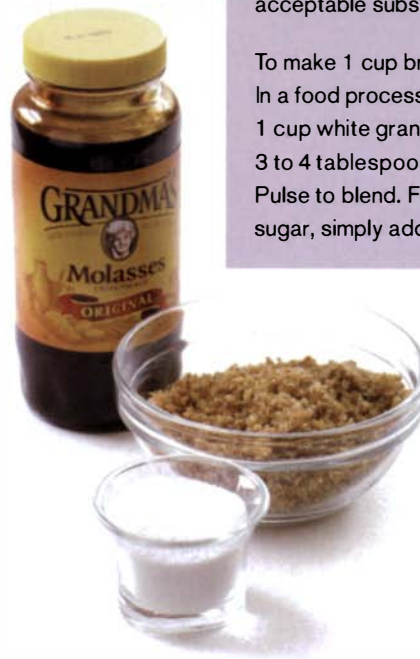
Storage tip:

Store brown sugar tightly wrapped in a cool, dark place. If you find that your sugar has dried out and hardened, sprinkle it with a few drops of water and microwave it on low for 15 to 20 seconds. Heating the sugar gently like this will soon bring it back to its original soft state. If you don't have a microwave, tuck a slice of sandwich bread in with the sugar to soften it overnight.

In a pinch, make your own

If you're in the middle of a recipe and discover you're out of brown sugar, you can easily make an acceptable substitute.

To make 1 cup brown sugar: In a food processor, combine 1 cup white granulated sugar with 3 to 4 tablespoons molasses. Pulse to blend. For a darker brown sugar, simply add more molasses.



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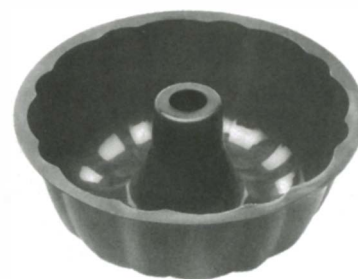
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Butter

is the cornerstone of all baking, with its irreplaceable flavor and powerful tenderizing properties.

When flour and liquid mix, flour develops gluten, which is what makes bread desirably chewy but can make pastries, quick breads, and cakes tough. Butter tenderizes by coating the flour, inhibiting gluten development, so that your baked goods are delicate and melt in your mouth.

Which type of butter should I use?

In baking, unsalted butter (also called sweet butter) is preferable to salted for several reasons. Salted butter contains varying amounts of salt depending on the brand, so recipes call for unsalted butter and a measured amount of salt to ensure consistency.

Another reason to avoid salted butter is that it isn't always fresh. (The preservative nature of salt means that salted butter can be kept longer on market shelves; salt also masks off flavors.)

Some grocery stores now carry higher-fat, European-style butters. In these butters, more fat means less water, which in turn means flakier, more tender, and more flavorful pastries. These butters are a wonderful splurge, but don't feel like you must buy them to be a good baker. As long as you use fresh, unsalted butter, your recipes will come out well, no matter the brand.

Storage tip:

To keep butter as fresh as possible, store it tightly wrapped away from light on a back shelf in your refrigerator (not in the butter compartment on the fridge door; the temperature fluctuates too much there). You can freeze butter, too. It may seem watery it thaws, but you'll find little difference in the final baked product.



Different temperatures for different uses

COLD butter is typically used in pie dough and puff pastry recipes. Rather than being thoroughly incorporated into a dough, the butter is left in fairly distinct pieces. Then, as the dough is rolled out, the butter is flattened into thin sheets. In the oven, these sheets of butter melt, and the water within the butter evaporates; the steam that results makes the dough rise, creates pockets of air, and produces flaky sheets of pastry that shatter when you bite into them.

MELTED butter is called for in some baking recipes when the flavor of butter is desired but not the light, fluffy characteristics associated with a creamed batter. Melted butter should be at room temperature (not hot, unless specified) so that it blends easily into your batter. Sometimes a recipe will have you melt the butter until the milk solids turn brown—making what's called brown butter—for an added layer of nutty flavor.

SOFTENED butter is typically called for in recipes for cakes, cookies, and certain pastries that rely on the leavening power of creamed butter and sugar. Softened butter is best for baking when it's still somewhat cool, not necessarily "room temperature" (that's often too soft on warm days). It should be pliable but not too soft. This is the temperature at which sugar crystals cut into the butter most effectively, creating the maximum amount of air pockets to lighten your batter. Too cold and firm and the sugar won't cut into the butter easily enough; too warm and the sugar will simply dissolve into the butter.

If you have an instant-read thermometer, you can check for the ideal temperature: 65° to 67°F, a little cooler than room temperature. Or you can press your finger into the butter to test it. It's perfect when your finger makes an indentation but can't go all the way through the butter. Also, if you can bend your stick of butter without it snapping or mashing (see the photo below)—it will feel almost plastic—it's at the right temperature.



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Vanilla brings a mellow essence to baked goods and does a fantastic job of enhancing other flavors, such as fruit and chocolate. Of course, vanilla on its own is a spectacular flavor as well.

Storage tip:

Vanilla beans will dry out and become brittle if left out in the air, so wrap them in foil, seal them in a zip-top bag, and store them in a cool, dark area. They'll last this way for at least several months.

The bean

The most potent, albeit the most expensive, way to add vanilla flavor is with the bean. Inside the pod you'll find thousands of tiny black specks bursting with vanilla flavor. If you're making a custard or otherwise infusing a liquid with vanilla, throw both the seeds and the pod in the pot. If you're adding vanilla seeds to a batter and you want to be sure they're distributed evenly, take a small bit of the batter, smush the seeds into it until they're thoroughly mixed in, and then fold this concentrated vanilla portion into the rest of the batter.

The paste

Vanilla paste combines the best of both bean and extract. It has the consistency of a thick syrup and holds hundreds of vanilla seeds in suspension. It's like vanilla extract in its strength and how it is used but has the added visual benefit of the black seeds associated with a vanilla bean. Like extract, if vanilla paste is stored in a dark, cool place, it should last for several months.

The extract

Vanilla extract, a less costly alternative to vanilla beans, is an easy way to add vanilla flavor to baked goods, as it mixes easily into batters.

But the strength of the extract will dissipate with prolonged heat, so if you're adding extract to something cooked on the stovetop, such as a custard or a poaching liquid, add it after the custard or liquid is off the stove and starting to cool. Because vanilla extract is sensitive to heat and light, keep the bottle in a cool, dark place; it should last for several months.

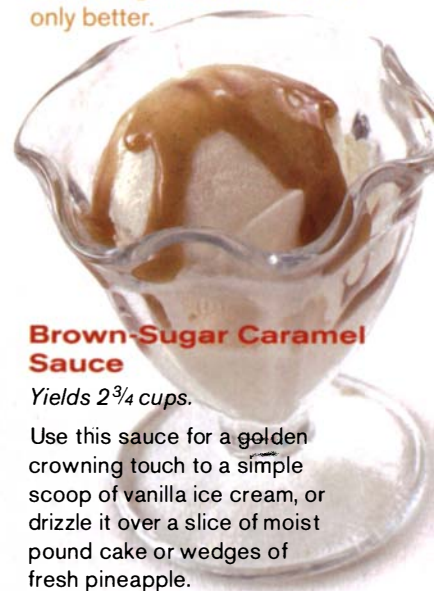
To remove the seeds



Hold the bean down on either end. With the tip of a paring knife, poke a hole in the top and slide it down the bean, splitting it in half lengthwise. Open it with the knife tip and scrape down, collecting the seeds on the blade.

Brown sugar, butter, and vanilla...

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Brown-Sugar Caramel Sauce

Yields 2¾ cups.

Use this sauce for a golden crowning touch to a simple scoop of vanilla ice cream, or drizzle it over a slice of moist pound cake or wedges of fresh pineapple.

- 2 cups packed brown sugar** (light or dark)
- ¾ cup water**
- 1½ cups heavy cream**
- 4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter**, cut into 4 chunks
- Seeds scraped from**
- 1 vanilla bean**
- ¼ teaspoon table salt**

In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, combine the brown sugar and water. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Cook over high heat, swirling the pan continuously, until the caramel reaches 280°F on a candy thermometer.

Immediately remove the pan from the heat and slowly and carefully pour in the cream (the caramel may sputter). Boil over high heat for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally, to blend. Remove from the heat and slowly whisk in the butter, vanilla seeds, and salt.

Cool slightly before using. The sauce can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two weeks or in the freezer indefinitely.

Pastry chef Joanne Chang owns Flour, a bakery and café in Boston. ♦



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wrapping it up

Now that you've made those delicious and beautiful tarts, cakes, pies, cookies, and candies, here are some clever ways to wrap them up for holiday gift-giving

BY AMY ALBERT



Haunt flea markets

and consignment shops for vintage tins, canisters, and ceramic planters; line them first with colored tissue or unbleached parchment, if you like (A caveat: when scavenging this way, you may find yourself tempted to hang onto the best finds instead of giving them away.) Anne Disrude, a food stylist, advises finding an interesting container first and then cutting cookies to fit into it.

Use a pretty dishtowel

or napkin, secured with ribbon, to wrap cookies. (The Japanese often wrap gifts in fabric.) Set a small bowl or disposable foil dish in the center of the cloth to hold the cookies.



A latte bowl,

an oversized coffee cup, or even an antique mixing bowl makes a nifty gift; all are appealing ways to present baked treats like biscotti or butter cookies—which, after all, are made to savor with a cup of coffee. Heap the cookies in the container and then use cellophane and ribbon to wrap them, beggar's purse style.





Save berry baskets

from summer trips to farmstands and farmers' markets; jazzed up with tissue or cellophane, a humble basket or green cardboard box takes on new life when it becomes a gift box for truffles or fudge.

A clever packing vessel

may be hiding in the kitchenware department. A bamboo steamer (\$10 to \$15 at Asian grocers, restaurant-supply stores, or www.wokshop.com) makes a safe carrier and a clever gift box for a tart—or even two, if the steamer has two tiers. Canning jars, glass refrigerator containers, and even Pyrex measuring cups are handy carriers—plus, you'll be giving something useful to hang onto.



Photos: Scott Phillips

It's better to give than to retrieve

For attractive vessels for baked goods that you needn't worry about retrieving, buy disposable bakery boxes and bags. Party and stationery stores are good sources for these. For unusual paper, boxes, and ribbon, look up Kate's Paperie (www.katespaperie.com; 888-941-9169). Unbleached baking parchment is sold at health-food stores; it's often silicone coated, ideal for wrapping buttery cookies and cakes. For Chinese takeout containers, try your local takeout joint, or visit www.partypoofers.com (616-651-9162). Sweet Celebrations (800-328-6722; www.sweetc.com) carries these, and cake boxes, too. Fet Pack (800-883-3872; www.fetpack.com) and Paper Mart (www.papermart.com; 800-745-8800) sell cellophane bags and wrap. Sur La Table (800-243-0852; www.surlatable.com) offers sets of paper pans for quick breads or cakes, starting at \$6.



Amy Albert is Fine Cooking's senior editor. ♦

What went wrong?

Every year around this time, I get many calls from home bakers struggling to figure out what went wrong with their cakes, pie crusts, cookies, or chocolate desserts. The answer isn't always obvious since one symptom can have several possible causes. Here are six common baking problems, along with their most likely remedies.

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

Why did my cake sink?

A cake can sink in the center if it isn't cooked enough or if it's overleavened. If the center of the cake is wet, it wasn't done; if the cake is cooked through, overleavening is the likely culprit. Leaveners like baking soda and baking powder enlarge air bubbles that already exist in the batter. In a hot oven, the bubbles expand more, lifting and lightening the cake. But if there's too much leavener, the bubbles get too big, run into one another, float to the top of the batter, and burst. As a result, the cake sinks and it's dense and heavy.

For most recipes, 1 to 1 ¼ teaspoons of baking powder per cup of flour or ¼ teaspoon of baking soda per cup of flour is ideal.

Why is my pie crust so tough?

If your pie crust is tough like cardboard and shrinks drastically during baking, it means that too much gluten formed during mixing and rolling.

When you stir water into flour, proteins in the flour grab water and one another and form strong, elastic, bubble-gum-like sheets of gluten. Gluten is essential in baked goods—it's a big part of what holds them together. Sometimes you need a lot of gluten (for example, when making bread), but for a pie crust, you want just a little, only enough to bind the crust.

For a more tender pie crust, try working the fat (butter, lard, or shortening) into the flour more thoroughly. This greases

the proteins, preventing them from forming gluten. The goal is to coat a lot of the flour with the fat for tenderness but leave some of the flour uncoated, allowing enough gluten to form to hold the crust together. You might also try using more fat and letting it come to room temperature so that it's softer and coats the proteins better. When you add water to the butter-flour mixture, be gentle with the dough to minimize the formation of gluten.

Another way to get more tender crusts is by adding sugar. Flour proteins combine with the sugar instead of the water and other proteins, and very little gluten forms. The high sugar

content of cakes and cookies contributes to their tenderness.

Finally, an acidic ingredient such as vinegar can cut tough gluten strands and tenderize crusts, which is why some old-fashioned pie crust recipes call for a small amount of vinegar.

Why did my chocolate clump into a grainy mass?

You know how dipping a wet teaspoon into a sugar bowl causes the sugar grains to stick together in a little clump? This happens because a tiny amount

Why isn't my pie crust flaky?

A big key to making flaky crusts is to have large, flat pieces of cold, firm butter, shortening, or lard in the rolled-out dough. When the dough goes into a hot oven, these pieces of fat remain solid just long enough for the dough above and below them to begin to set. Eventually, the fat melts and steam comes out of the dough, puffing it into flaky layers.

The more of these large pieces of fat you can get into your dough, the flakier your pastry will be. The fat pieces must be large (the size of a big lima bean) so they don't melt instantly in the oven,

and they must be flat so they don't melt a hole right through the crust.

Pastry chefs can work cold fat into dry flour with their fingertips, but Jim Dodge, an author and baker, suggests rolling the flour and fat together dry on the counter until the mixture resembles flaking paint. This helps ensure lots of flat pieces. Always start with large, cold chunks of fat.

Butter can make very flaky crusts, but shortening and lard are even better because they'll hold their shape over a wider temperature range.

Why did my caramel crystallize?

When you dissolve sugar in water and boil it to make caramel, the solution becomes supersaturated with sugar molecules as the water evaporates. At this point, it's very vulnerable to crystallizing. The slightest shake of the pan, stirring, or even an undissolved sugar crystal stuck to the side of the pan can cause a chain reaction that crystallizes the entire solution.

Adding a small amount of corn syrup or lemon juice to the sugar solution at the start of boiling will ensure successful caramel. Why? A substance must be very pure to crystallize, so adding a different type of sugar to the solution prevents crystallization. Table sugar is pure sucrose, while corn syrup is glucose. The addition of lemon juice introduces a different type of sugar by breaking some of the table sugar into both glucose and fructose.

Why did my custard curdle?

of liquid causes dry particles to "glue" together.

Chocolate is composed of fine, dry particles (cocoa and sugar) in rich fat (cocoa butter). If a few drops of water (or even a bit of steam) get stirred into melted chocolate, the dry cocoa and sugar particles will clump together and form a dull, dry, grainy mass. This is called seizing.

You can fix seized chocolate by whisking in more water, which will provide enough liquid to wet all the seized particles and smooth the chocolate.

To prevent seized chocolate, you need to melt the chocolate with a sufficient amount of liquid from the recipe. The magic amount necessary is one table-spoon water (or a water-type liquid) for every two ounces chocolate. The liquid can be pure water or milk, or you can use cream or butter, but you'll need to calculate the amount of water they contribute (cream is 60 percent water, butter is 20 percent water). Specialty chocolates with high percentages of cocoa may need a bit more liquid.

If you're not adding any liquid to the melted chocolate, just be careful not to let water or steam get in the bowl, and be sure to use dry utensils.

Of the two types of stirred custards—pastry creams and crème anglaise—pastry cream is less susceptible to curdling because it contains starch (usually flour or cornstarch), which prevents coagulation of egg proteins. Crème anglaise, on the other hand, will curdle if it gets above 180°F, which is the temperature at which egg proteins coagulate. Cooking the custard over a hot water bath, stirring constantly, and careful monitoring should be sufficient to keep the temperature even and moderate.

For baked custards, such as puddings, crème brûlée, or even cheesecakes, you can prevent curdling by baking the custards in a water bath with a towel laid in the bottom of the pan (in the water) to protect against too much heat. The water bath keeps the custards at an even, moderate temperature (the water temperature can't go above 212°F), far below the ambient heat of the oven.

Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of CookWise. She's working on her next book, BakeWise. ♦

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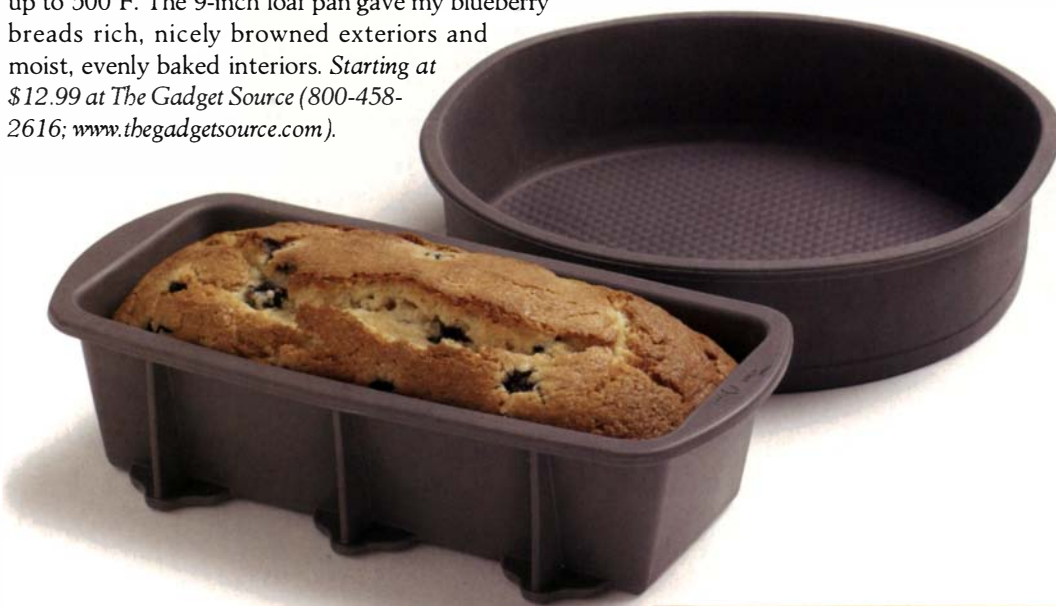
Carry four pies at a time

As a kid, I always had the nerve-racking task of balancing two or three pies in my lap on drives to holiday get-togethers, so I for one welcome the Chef's Tote from Lamarlé. The pie-carrying case has two double-shelved containers that are held together by a detachable handle. Each case can accommodate two pies or one large cake. The containers neatly fit on top of each other, and the lids seal tightly so you won't lose a pie on a sharp turn. \$19.99 at Frye (866-573-3793; www.fryeintl.com).



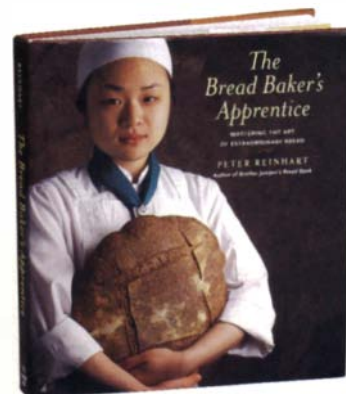
Nonstick baking—with a twist

The flexibility of these silicone molds is a little alarming at first, but Llorénte's baking pans performed wonderfully in my tests. Their loaf and cake pans are completely nonstick and oven-safe at temperatures up to 500°F. The 9-inch loaf pan gave my blueberry breads rich, nicely browned exteriors and moist, evenly baked interiors. Starting at \$12.99 at The Gadget Source (800-458-2616; www.thegadgetsource.com).



No-work flour-sifting

Fine Cooking contributing editor Abigail Johnson Dodge swears by Norpro's battery-operated flour sifter to ease the inevitable hand-ache from sifting flour around the baking-crazy holiday time. The sifter has a 4-cup capacity and comes with a lid to keep flour from flying all over your countertop. \$13.50 at Kitchen Kitchen (888-919-1466; www.kitchenkitchen.com).



A book for all breads

The Bread Baker's Apprentice, the latest book from baking instructor and *Fine Cooking* contributor Peter Reinhart, distills high-level bread baking into approachable techniques and well-worded recipes. The book's first fifty pages serve as a bread tutorial, answering questions like what type of yeast to use (Reinhart prefers instant) and outlining the twelve stages of bread baking. The recipes range from sesame bagels to potato rosemary bread. In our kitchen, Pizza Napoletana was a beautiful thin-crust pie, while the *pain à l'ancienne* baguettes had a superb browned crust and a pleasant, chewy texture. \$24.50 at Amazon.com.

(Continued)



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READER SERVICE NO. 63

She Turned Her Passion For Cooking Into A Profitable Business!

Have utensils, will travel could be Susan Titcomb's motto. Fourteen years ago, Titcomb, a 41 year old mother of two from San Diego, California, had a passion for cooking and a desire to control her own destiny. Armed with an idea, her husband's support, very little capital and virtually no business experience, she started the country's first personal chef service. Personally Yours Personal Chef Service became an overnight success and spurred her on to become a cofounder of the United States Personal Chef Association. "A personal chef can make \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year, depending upon the hours worked and the number of clients", says Titcomb. Since most clients work full-time, Titcomb goes into their home and cooks 10 meals for the whole family. Her service includes grocery shopping, preparation, cooking, packaging and cleanup. With a cost as low as \$10 per meal, per person, Titcomb always has a long waiting list. So what does it take to become a personal chef? "Organization, persistence, a love of cooking and a little know how," says Titcomb. *For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Association at 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspca.com>. Training and resources available for all experience levels.*

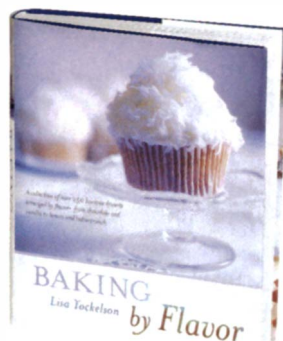


READER SERVICE NO. 100

Understand the flavors of baking

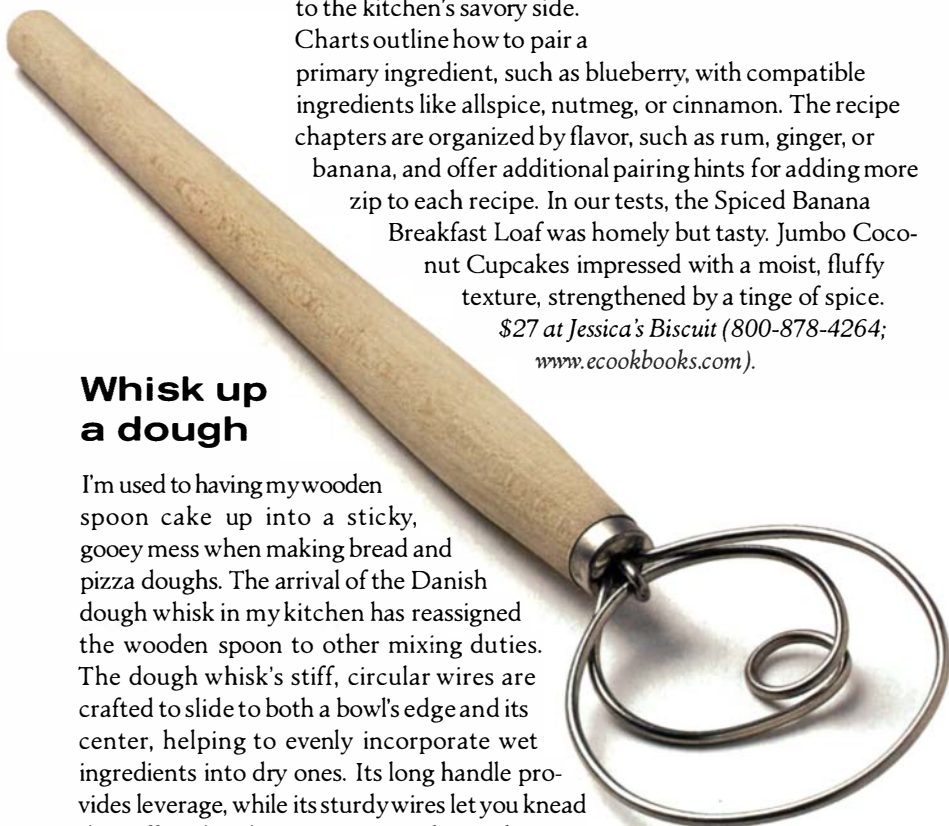
In *Baking by Flavor*, Lisa Yockelson examines baking in improvisational, flavor-pairing terms more familiar to the kitchen's savory side. Charts outline how to pair a primary ingredient, such as blueberry, with compatible ingredients like allspice, nutmeg, or cinnamon. The recipe chapters are organized by flavor, such as rum, ginger, or banana, and offer additional pairing hints for adding more zip to each recipe. In our tests, the Spiced Banana Breakfast Loaf was homely but tasty. Jumbo Coconut Cupcakes impressed with a moist, fluffy texture, strengthened by a tinge of spice.

\$27 at Jessica's Biscuit (800-878-4264; www.ecookbooks.com).



Whisk up a dough

I'm used to having my wooden spoon cake up into a sticky, gooey mess when making bread and pizza doughs. The arrival of the Danish dough whisk in my kitchen has reassigned the wooden spoon to other mixing duties. The dough whisk's stiff, circular wires are crafted to slide to both a bowl's edge and its center, helping to evenly incorporate wet ingredients into dry ones. Its long handle provides leverage, while its sturdy wires let you knead the stiffest doughs. \$11.95 at Cook's Market (888-241-3614; www.cooksmarket.com).

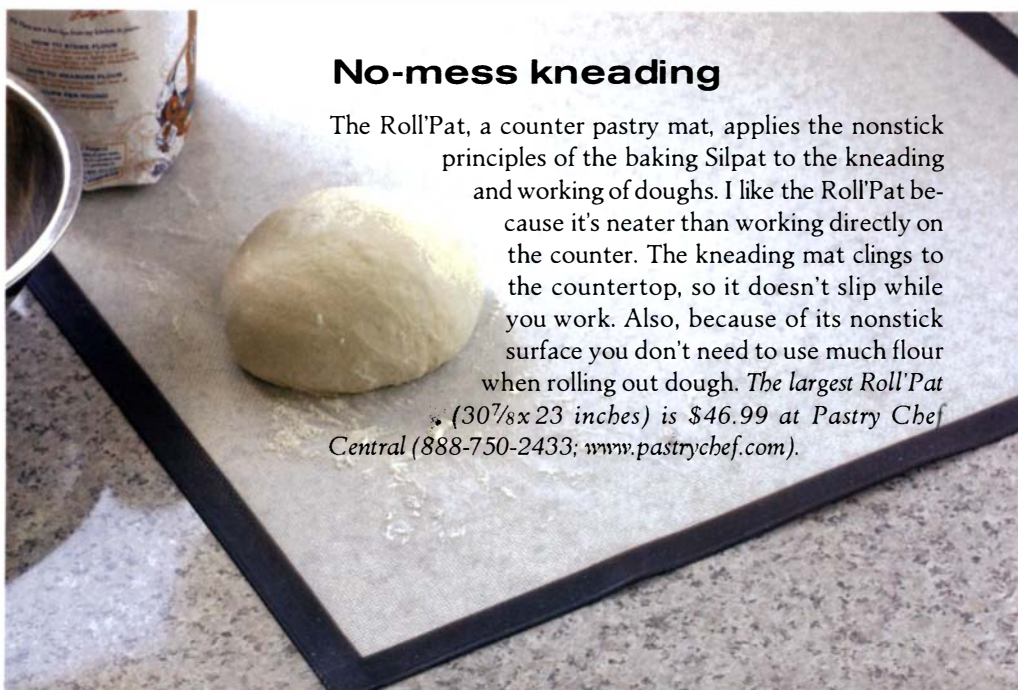


Get the tang of buttermilk, without the dairy carton

When the urge to make waffles, pancakes, or even quick breads or coffee cakes strikes, we often don't have that essential ingredient—buttermilk—on hand. Saco's powdered buttermilk solves that problem. Mix it into your dry ingredients (and add water to your liquids) and it provides the tenderness and tang of its fresh counterpart. Even better is that the powder keeps indefinitely in the cupboard. We've found it does well in nearly all recipes that call for buttermilk, but it does tend to clump up, so it helps to sift it before using. About \$3.99 at supermarkets.

No-mess kneading

The Roll'Pat, a counter pastry mat, applies the nonstick principles of the baking Silpat to the kneading and working of doughs. I like the Roll'Pat because it's neater than working directly on the counter. The kneading mat clings to the countertop, so it doesn't slip while you work. Also, because of its nonstick surface you don't need to use much flour when rolling out dough. The largest Roll'Pat (30 7/8 x 23 inches) is \$46.99 at Pastry Chef Central (888-750-2433; www.pastrychef.com).



Fruity essence flavors desserts

The literal translation of *Fiori di Sicilia*—"flowers of Sicily"—only hints at this oil's bright, full flavor. *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Molly Stevens loves using this powerful concoction, a mix of citrus oils and vanillin, to lend a touch of complexity and flavor to quick breads or *panettone*, the traditional Italian holiday fruit cake. Add 1/4 teaspoon to custards, icings, or pound cake batter. A 1-ounce bottle is \$4.95 from The Baker's Catalogue (800-827-6836; www.kingarthurflour.com).

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red spaghetti-strap dress and a necklace, is looking at a menu. The menu is held by someone whose hand is visible on the left. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white curtains.

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READER SERVICE NO. 42





WINNING TIP

Making thumbprint cookies

Use a thimble of any size to make the indentations in cookies to be filled with jam or jelly. The thimble makes perfectly even indentations every time.

—Anna Victoria Reich,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Make quick cookies from leftover pie dough

Since so many recipes for pie and tart crusts make enough for two crusts when you only need one, I often end up with spare disks of dough. While the dough will keep for several months in the freezer, I hate to let it go to waste. Instead, I turn the dough into small, crisp, not-too-sweet cookies to serve with coffee. I roll the defrosted dough $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, cut it into 1-inch rounds or other shapes, brush with egg wash, and dust with sugar or a mix of sugar and spices (such as cinnamon, nutmeg, or cardamom), or even ground nuts, and then bake at 350°F until lightly golden around the edges.

—Molly Stevens,
Williston, Vermont

Quick baking cleanup

A friend once showed me the best way to clean up the flour that's left on the counter after dusting or kneading dough. Instead of making a gooey mess

with a damp sponge, try sweeping up the dry flour with a small whisk broom, especially one with soft bristles.

—Paisley Close,
San Diego, California

Roll out pastry dough with confectioners' sugar

When I roll out pastry dough for a dessert, instead of using flour to dust the rolling surface, I use confectioners' sugar. It keeps the pastry dough from sticking, and it won't dry out the dough or toughen the baked pastry like flour can if you work too much of it into your dough. The confectioners' sugar will cause more browning during baking—a benefit for pie and tart crusts.

—Gale Gand,
Riverwoods, Illinois

Measure sticky ingredients easily

When I need to measure sticky syrups like maple syrup, honey, molasses, or corn syrup, I measure out the oil in the recipe first

and then use the same cup to measure the syrup. The oil-coated cup keeps the syrupy ingredient from sticking so it all ends up in the batter. If the recipe doesn't call for oil, I just lightly wipe the inside of the cup with vegetable oil before measuring.

—Kate Brick,
Boston, Massachusetts

Flour your baking equipment with a puff

I keep a new cosmetic powder puff in my flour canister to dust my pastry boards and rolling pin lightly and evenly with flour before beginning my pastry work.

—Pat Swart,
Bridgeton, New Jersey

A medicine dropper measures out extracts

I like using flavored extracts in my baking but find it wasteful and irritating when the extract runs down the sides of the bottle when I'm trying to measure it out. Now I use a child's medicine

dropper to measure extracts. The droppers are marked on the sides with incremental measures of a teaspoon so it's easy to get precisely the amount called for in the recipe. Many pharmacies will give you a medicine dropper if you request one.

—Whitman Kramer,
via e-mail

Keeping a pastry cloth fresh

A well-floured pastry cloth works wonders when rolling out dough, but it can get stale fairly quickly. I prevent this by keeping mine in the freezer in a plastic bag. The cloth gets better with use. Just scrape it clean with a dough scraper after use, fold it up, and freeze. A bonus is the cold surface for rolling out your dough.

—Ann Putnam,
via e-mail

Keeping plastic wrap off the dessert surface

Tiramisu usually calls for a generous dusting of cocoa powder or chopped chocolate on top. But since tiramisu must be covered and refrigerated before serving, I used to have trouble keeping the plastic wrap from sticking to its surface. My solution is the little plastic three-pronged disks that you often find in the center of take-out pizzas. I just set the disk lightly on top of my tiramisu and drape the plastic wrap over it. The disk can, of course, be washed and reused.

—Christine Cheung,
Cincinnati, Ohio

A spatula quickly cleans mixing bowls

Whenever I make a yeast dough in my stand mixer, the mixing bowl is always encrusted with the sticky residue of the dough. I used to scrub the bowl in water with a brush or sponge and then spend more time cleaning the cleaning utensils, but I'm wiser now. I just soak the bowl in cold water and dishwashing liquid for a half hour, and then I scrape a rubber spatula around the inside of the bowl to remove the dough before quickly washing.

—Anne Yodice,
Wantage, New Jersey

Perfectly whipped egg whites

For the best volume when whipping egg whites, wipe down your mixing bowl and beaters with white vinegar to ensure that they're free of any lingering traces of oil or grease that could prevent the egg whites from whipping up properly. The acid in the vinegar also negates the need for cream of tartar, so if your recipe calls for it, you can leave it out.

—Cassia Schell,
via e-mail

Thoroughly greasing a bundt pan

After several attempts to grease an elaborate bundt pan with a paper towel, I still wasn't able to get the grease into every cranny of the pan. Then I tried greasing the pan with a new makeup sponge, and it worked great. The sharp angles of the soft, triangular sponge smooth the shortening into every corner of the pan. I bought these sponges in the cosmetics area of the drugstore.

—Nanci Oliviero,
Toronto, Ontario



Bain marie made easy

The hardest part of making crème brûlée is not making the actual custard but getting the ramekins and their water bath in and out of the oven without burning yourself or sloshing water all over. I find it easiest to place the ramekins in a dry pan, put the pan into the hot oven, and then add the water to the bain marie using a curved, long-necked watering can. When it's time for the custards to come out of the oven, I use a turkey baster to carefully remove some of the hot water from the bain marie before taking it out of the oven.

—Wendy Soltau,
Naperville, Illinois

Cookie crust shortcut

When I make cheesecake or any other cake that calls for a crushed-cookie crust, I don't melt the butter as is usually called for in the recipe. Instead, I use my food processor to grind the cookies into coarse crumbs, then I add cold butter and pulse the machine a few times to incorporate it into the crumbs. I think this results in a more even distribution of butter. Then, when I press the crumbs into the cake pan, the heat of my hands melts the butter and makes the crust pliable and easy to handle.

—Jack Kane,
Houston, Texas ♦

HOW TO ENTER & WIN

Attention cooks: We want your best tips—we'll pay for the ones we publish—and we'll give a prize (see below) to the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or send e-mail to fc@taunton.com.



The prize: The hollow-ground edge on this 6½-inch Japanese-style knife by Wüsthof prevents vegetables from sticking to the blade by allowing air pockets to form, making it the ideal tool for cutting, dicing, or thinly slicing any vegetable, especially potatoes. Value: \$105.



Holiday Pies with a Pretty Twist

BY CAROLYN WEIL

Whether you're making apple, pecan, or



pumpkin pie, here's how to make it the star of the dessert table

I've finally given up on introducing some new dessert sensation to the Thanksgiving table. It doesn't seem to matter if my sweet offering is unbelievably fantastic; any attempt to shake things up meets with resistance. The fact is that apple, pumpkin, and pecan pies are mandatory at this time of year. So instead of fighting tradition, I now embrace it, and I must admit that I've come to enjoy the annual challenge of making the ordinary extraordinary.

I expect my guests to declare this year's pies better than ever, and I bet yours will, too. If you're the one supplying dessert for the holiday table, I heartily encourage you to try these recipes. They all use the same pie dough recipe—a double batch of dough makes enough crust for all three pies. If you're not confident about handling pie dough, you'll find the tips at right should help guide you. Yes, these pies may look ambitious for an amateur baker, but if you follow my detailed directions and photos, I'm sure you'll have success.

For apple and pumpkin pies, I don't fiddle with flavor. I've made enough of these classic pies to have fine-tuned the recipes. But I do work on their appearance. This year, my theme is autumn leaves. I'm giving the apple pie a gorgeous top crust composed of forty or so leafy pastry cutouts. Pumpkin pie, which is usually so homely looking, gets a leafy rim instead of a regular fluted one; eight sugar-sprinkled leaves set in a starburst on top give the pie a professional look. For both pies, the technique is simple (you can cut out the leaves either with a knife, following the illustrations on pp. 42-43, or with your own leaf-shaped cookie cutter), and the results are both lovely and delicious.

For pecan pie, I've given the traditional recipe a bit of an overhaul. I've never been a fan of those cloyingly sweet and gooey pecan pie fillings, but I realized that I do love that crisp nutty topping. That led to a revelation. If I transformed the pie into a shallow tart, I'd get a thinner layer of chewy, brown-sugar-covered pecans—in essence, more nutty crispness and less sweetness. A hint of rum in the filling livens up the flavor. Trust me, anyone who has steered clear of pecan pie for the reasons I've just described will love this variation.

Keys to a well-behaved pie crust

Butter Pie Dough

Yields 24 ounces, enough for one Apple Pie Covered with Leaves, or one each of the Pecan Rum Tart and the Pumpkin Pie with a Leafy Rim. To make enough dough for all three desserts, double the recipe.

**11¼ ounces (2½ cups)
unbleached all-purpose flour**
¼ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch cubes
5 to 6 tablespoons cold water

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, sugar, and salt. Mix for a few seconds to blend. Add the cold butter and cut it in on low speed until the pieces are no bigger than peas. The texture will be floury with flecks of butter; it won't be homogenous. Add 5 tablespoons of the water and mix for a few seconds on low, just long enough to let the dough pull together; if needed, add another 1 tablespoon water. Cut the dough in half, pat each into a ball, and flatten each into a thick disk. Roll out the dough right away, as instructed in the specific recipe.

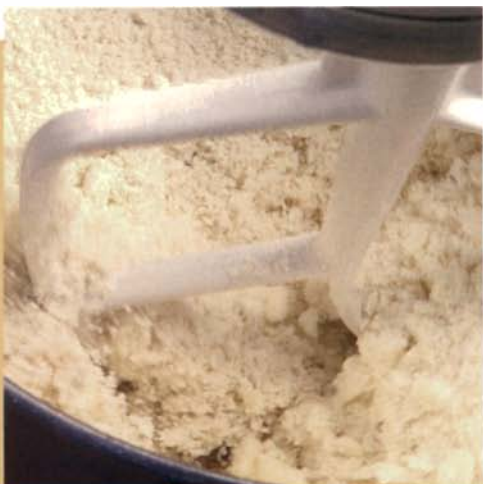
Tip: how to make the crust ahead

Make the dough, roll it out right away, and lay it in a freezerproof pie or tart pan. Seal the pan in a plastic bag and freeze. Make the leaf cutouts as directed on p. 42 and freeze them on a baking sheet. When they're hard, put them in a freezer container. The crust and leaves will hold for up to a month in the freezer. To thaw the apple pie shell and leaves, let them sit at room temperature (leaves in a single layer) until they're pliable. For the pumpkin pie and pecan tart, blind bake the shells (with foil and weights) without thawing first; baking times will be longer, so follow the recipes' doneness cues.

MIX ON LOW SPEED UNTIL THE TEXTURE IS FLOURY WITH FLECKS OF BUTTER. The largest butter pieces should be no bigger than peas, and the mixture will look uneven. Be sure to start with butter that's refrigerator-cold to get a tender, flaky crust. After you cut the butter into the flour, pick up a pinch of flour and butter and mold it into a square. If your fingers feel greasy, the butter is too warm, so chill the mixture for 15 minutes.

KEEP THE WORK SURFACE AND THE DOUGH LIGHTLY FLOURED WHEN ROLLING. No need to go crazy, but a light dusting every now and then keeps the dough from sticking. Another trick is to give the dough a quarter turn and a lift as you roll. If it's starting to stick to the board, you'll know early enough to do something about it. I keep a pastry brush handy as I roll the dough to brush off any excess flour.

CHILL THE DOUGH ONLY AFTER IT HAS BEEN ROLLED OUT AND SET IN THE PIE PAN. Many pie crust recipes call for chilling the dough before rolling it. I think this leads to a tougher crust and causes the dough to crack during rolling. You'll find that my pie crust rolls out beautifully right after it's mixed. I do chill the dough once it's in the pie pan to let the gluten in the flour relax and to firm up the butter.



Pecan Rum Tart

*Yields one 9½-inch tart;
serves eight.*

My favorite brand of rum for the pecan filling is Meyer's Dark Jamaican.

1 disk (½ recipe) Butter Pie Dough (see the recipe at left)
2 large eggs
¼ cup packed brown sugar
½ cup dark corn syrup
2 tablespoons dark rum
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch table salt
6 ounces (1½ cups) pecans, coarsely chopped

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough disk into an 11-inch round that's ⅛ inch thick (trim an edge to check thickness). Fold the dough in half and ease it into a 9½-inch tart pan with a removable base, unfold it without stretching it, and press the dough firmly into the sides of the pan. Trim to the top of the pan by running the rolling pin over the top edge of the tart pan. (Save the scraps to make leaves for the



pumpkin pie, if you like.) Chill the crust in the refrigerator or freezer for at least 30 minutes.

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Cover the tart dough with foil, making sure to gently fold the foil completely over the top edge of the tart. Cover the bottom with a generous amount of pie weights (I use pennies, but raw rice or dried beans are fine). Bake until the crust no longer looks wet and is pale and golden in spots and on the edges, about 30 minutes. Remove the weights and foil, lightly prick the crust in several places with a fork (but don't pierce through it), and bake uncovered until the crust is golden, about another 15 minutes.

In a medium bowl, mix the eggs and brown sugar. Add the corn syrup and beat well. Add the rum, melted butter, vanilla, and salt and beat well. Stir in the chopped pecans and scrape into the blind-baked tart shell. Arrange the pecans evenly. Bake until the filling begins to rise and is firm to the touch in the center, 23 to 27 minutes. Let cool before serving.

By turning traditional pecan pie into a shallow pecan rum tart, the nuts stay crisp and toasty on top and the brown sugar-rum filling is sweet without being cloying.



Making a perfect pile of pastry leaves

Cut out as many leaves as you can with a paring knife. Use the appropriate leaf illustration (shown in the recipes below) as a guide or cut out the leaves by eye. You can also use a leaf-shaped cookie cutter (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86).



Vein the leaves with the dull side of the knife. Use gentle but steady pressure to indent each leaf, pressing just less than halfway through the dough.



FOR THE PUMPKIN PIE, press the leaves on the rim of the empty pie shell, overlapping each one slightly and using a little water on the bottom of the leaves to stick them together. Let the widest part of each leaf protrude slightly from the edge of the crust.

Pumpkin Pie with a Leafy Rim

Serves eight.

Metal and unglazed ceramic pie pans work better than glass for this pie because the crust doesn't shrink as much during blind baking. Unglazed ceramic has the added advantage of making the crust extra crisp. You can double this recipe, using one 15-ounce can of pumpkin; it will be just shy of 2 cups, but that's fine. I love this pie even more when it's made with fresh pumpkin purée. Serve this with a dollop of freshly whipped cream, if you like.

2 disks (1 recipe) Butter Pie Dough (see the recipe on p. 40)

Granulated sugar for sprinkling

2 large eggs

1 large egg yolk

½ cup packed light brown sugar

¼ teaspoon table salt

¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground ginger

¼ teaspoon ground cloves

¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

½ cup dark corn syrup

1 cup canned pumpkin purée

1½ cups heavy cream

To make the pie crust and decorative rim: On a lightly floured surface, roll one of the dough disks into a rough round that's 12 inches in diameter and ⅛ inch thick (trim an edge to check thickness). Fold the dough in half and ease it into a 9-inch pie pan (preferably metal or unglazed ceramic) and then unfold it. If using a metal or ceramic pan, trim the dough to the edge of the pan. If using a glass pan, trim the dough to ⅛ inch of the edge of the pan (the overhang compensates for shrinkage). Cover and refrigerate. Press the scraps together and roll them out again. Cut out at least 32 small leaves, just slightly larger than 2 inches long and ½ inch wide (the illustration at right is actual size; simply cut out a pastry leaf and set it on top to check), and use the dull edge of a paring knife to indent them with thin lines like leaf veins. If you need more dough, borrow a large pinch from the second disk of dough (save the rest of the second dough disk for the Pecan Rum Tart or another pie).

Put eight of the prettiest leaves on a parchment-lined

baking sheet. Sprinkle with a pinch of granulated sugar to add a little sparkle and refrigerate.

Press the remaining small leaves on the rim of the pie shell, as shown in the photo above. Chill the crust well, about 1 hour in the refrigerator.

At least 20 minutes before you're ready to bake the crust, position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Cover the crust with foil, gently folding the foil completely over the leaf edge. Cover the bottom with a generous amount of pie weights (I use pennies, but raw rice or dried beans are fine). Bake until the crust is pale and no longer looks wet and the sides are golden, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove the foil and weights and prick the crust very lightly with a fork (but don't pierce through it). Bake until the crust is golden all over, another 5 to 10 minutes.

To make the filling and bake:

Make a foil ring for the rim (see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 74). In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg yolk, and brown sugar. Add the salt and spices and mix well. Add the corn syrup and pumpkin purée and whisk until smooth. Stir in the cream. Pour the mixture into the pie shell and carefully set the foil ring on top. Handle the pie plate gently when you put it in (and take it out of) the oven; the leafy rim is fragile. Bake until the custard is risen around the edges and is still jiggly (but no longer wavy) in the center, 40 to 50 minutes. The custard will set up more as it cools.

Bake the eight reserved small leaves until golden, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool and set aside. Let the pie cool to room temperature and then chill for at least 2 hours.

To serve, set the eight reserved leaves on the surface of the pie in a starburst. Refresh the pie in a 375°F oven for a few minutes to take the chill off the crust.





FOR THE APPLE PIE, casually overlap the leaves in concentric circles toward the middle of the pie, minimizing the overlapping areas.



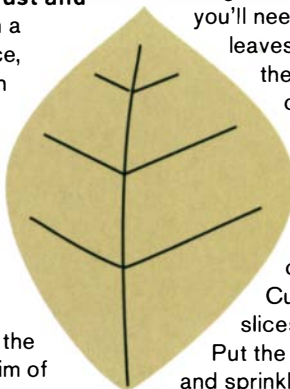
Apple Pie Covered with Leaves

Serves eight.

For this pie, I like to use Braeburns, Empires, Jonathans, Jonagolds, or Northern Spy apples.

2 disks Butter Pie Dough (see the recipe on p. 40)
5 to 6 firm, tart apples
½ cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
⅛ teaspoon table salt
1 to 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut up

To make the pie crust and decorative top: On a lightly floured surface, roll one of the dough disks into a 12-inch round that's ⅛ inch thick (trim an edge to check the thickness). Fold the dough in half, ease it into a 9-inch pie pan, and unfold it. Press the dough up the sides and over the rim of the pan, and trim it to the outer edge. Chill the dough while you cut out the leaves.



Pat the scraps into the bottom of the second disk and roll out the dough to ⅛ inch thick (the shape doesn't matter). With a paring knife or a leaf cutter, cut out as many 2x1½-inch leaves as you can (the illustration below is actual size; just cut out a pastry leaf and set it on top of the illustration to check), veining them with the dull edge of a paring knife, if you like. Pat the scraps together, roll out the dough again, and cut out more leaves. You'll need 45 to 55 leaves to cover the pie. (You can make smaller or larger leaves, if you like; you'll need more or fewer leaves accordingly.) Set the leaves aside in a cool place (but not in the refrigerator).

To make the filling and bake: Peel, quarter, and core the apples. Cut them into ¼-inch slices to get 7 cups. Put the apples in a bowl and sprinkle with the sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Toss gently and layer the

apples into the pie shell, tucking in any apples to create an even, smooth dome. Dot the apples with large flecks of the butter.

Starting at the rim of the pan, stick the dough leaves on the crust and apples, using a little water on the bottom of the leaves to help them adhere. You needn't press the leaves together; they'll seal during baking. Continue to overlap the leaves in concentric circles as shown in the photo above left.

Chill the pie in the refrigerator for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, position two racks to the lower third of the oven, set a foil-lined baking sheet on the lowest rack (to catch any drippings from the pie), and heat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the pie on the second-lowest rack until the crust is deep golden all over and the apples are tender when pierced with a long, thin knife blade, 60 to 80 minutes. Let the pie cool completely before serving so that the juices have a chance to set up and the filling won't be runny. Serve at room temperature or refresh briefly in a 400°F oven to warm the crust.

The leafy top crust on this apple pie is as tender as it is pretty. Be sure to let the pie cool completely before cutting into it so the apple juices have time to set up.

Carolyn Weil teaches and writes about baking. She's a pastry chef, a former bakery owner, and a contributor to The Baker's Dozen Cookbook. ♦



Chocolate Banana Swirl Cake

Serves ten to twelve.

This cake puts very ripe bananas to good use. Be sure to follow the time guidelines for unmolding the cake. If you wait too long, it will stick to the pan; take it out too early and it might break into chunks.

FOR THE PAN:

2 tablespoons
granulated sugar
1/3 cup medium-finely
chopped walnuts
Softened unsalted butter
for the pan

FOR THE CAKE:

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose
flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon table salt
6 ounces (3/4 cup) unsalted
butter, completely softened
at room temperature
1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
3 very ripe medium bananas
(unpeeled, about 14 ounces
total), peeled
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
3 large eggs

3 ounces (6 tablespoons)
buttermilk
4 ounces bittersweet chocolate,
melted and cooled

Prepare the pan: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, mix the sugar with the chopped walnuts. Generously butter a large bundt pan and coat with the nuts and sugar, pressing the nuts with your fingers to help them stick.

The pan sides will be coated and some of the nuts will fall to the bottom—that's fine.

Mix the batter: In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt until well blended. With an electric mixer (I use a KitchenAid fitted with the paddle attachment), beat the butter, sugar, bananas, and vanilla until well blended and the bananas are

almost smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until just incorporated.

Remove the bowl from the mixer. With a rubber spatula, alternately add half the flour mixture, all the buttermilk, and then the rest of the flour mixture, stirring until each addition is just blended. Spoon half the batter into a medium bowl and gently stir in the melted chocolate until



A marriage of chocolate and bananas creates



Three Great Coffee Cakes

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Coffee cakes are a great reminder that a cake needn't be complicated to be really good. If you're new to baking, they're a fine way to get your feet wet with a no-fail recipe that gives impressive results. And if you're a more seasoned baker, you'll enjoy the easy-breezy nature of these cakes (plus, none of the ingredient lists requires a wild goose chase).

There's more to recommend these coffee cakes, especially during hectic holiday time: They're extremely versatile and can go from brunch to teatime to a dinner party. They travel beautifully, which makes them great candidates for whatever potluck occasion you might find yourself invited to. And all of these coffee cakes taste even better the day after you make them.

A quick-bread method for easy mixing and moist results

You may have seen recipes for yeast-raised coffee cakes, but the ones here involve a quick-bread technique. There are two methods for mixing up a quick-bread type of cake; both use baking powder or baking soda (or sometimes both) to provide lift. The first technique is popularly known as the creamed-butter method. The second is a simple two-step process of mixing the dry and the wet ingredients (including either melted butter or oil) separately before gently stirring them together. I use both methods in the following recipes, as they both produce deliciously moist cakes that are great right out of the oven, and even better a day later.

an irresistibly moist cake

just combined. With a large spoon, alternately add a scoopful of each batter to the prepared pan, working around the pan until all the batter is used. Gently run a knife or the tip of a rubber spatula through the batter, once clockwise and once counterclockwise, to slightly swirl the batters. Gently tap the pan on the counter to settle the ingredients.

Bake the cake: Bake until a pick inserted in the center comes out with just a few crumbs sticking to it, about 40 minutes. Let the cake cool in the pan on a wire rack for 15 minutes. Gently tap the sides of the pan on the counter to loosen the cake. Invert the pan onto the rack, lift off the pan, and let the cake cool completely.



A crumb-

Fresh cranberries add sassy, bright flavor

Cranberry Streusel Cake

Serves nine.

I add the topping 40 minutes into baking rather than at the beginning, when it would sink too far into the cake, or at the end, when it wouldn't sink in at all.

FOR THE CAKE:

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, well softened at room temperature; more for the pan
1⅓ cups granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
3 large eggs, at room temperature
1 cup plain, low-fat yogurt
½ cup fresh cranberries, chopped

FOR THE STREUSEL:

¼ cup packed light brown sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
¼ cup chopped walnuts
¼ cup fresh cranberries, chopped

Make the cake: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly butter and flour a 9-inch-square baking pan. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, nutmeg, and salt until blended. With an electric mixer, beat the butter, sugar, and vanilla on medium speed until well blended, about 3 minutes. Reduce the speed to medium low and add the eggs one at a time, mixing until just incorporated. Using a wide rubber spatula, alternately fold the flour mixture and the yogurt into the butter mixture, beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Add the chopped cranberries

with the last addition of flour.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread it evenly. Tap the pan gently on the counter to release any air bubbles. Bake for 40 minutes.

Make the streusel: While the cake is baking, combine the brown sugar, flour, and cinnamon in a medium bowl. Add the butter and mix, using a fork, until the ingredients are well blended and form small crumbs. Stir in the walnuts and cranberries.

After the cake has baked for 40 minutes, sprinkle the streusel evenly over the top of the cake. Continue baking until a pick inserted in the center comes out clean, another 10 to 15 minutes. Cool in the pan on a wire rack until warm or room temperature. Cut into squares and serve.



Classic Crumb Cake

Serves twelve.

Melting all the butter at once and reserving half helps streamline things.

FOR THE CRUMB TOPPING:

12 ounces (1½ cups) unsalted butter; more for the pan
½ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup packed light brown sugar
1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
Pinch table salt
12 ounces (2⅔ cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE CAKE:

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 large egg

¾ cup milk

Reserved ½ cup melted unsalted butter

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar for dusting

Make the topping: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a large saucepan, melt all the butter; remove from the heat. Pour ½ cup into a measuring cup and reserve for mixing the cake batter. Add the sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt to the saucepan. Stir with a fork, pressing when needed, until there are no lumps of sugar. Add the flour and stir gently until well blended and crumbly. Set aside.

Make the cake: Lightly butter a 9x13-inch baking pan. In a

large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg, milk, reserved ½ cup melted butter, and vanilla until combined. Pour the liquids over the dry ingredients and gently stir until just blended. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly.

Break up the crumb mixture with your fingers and sprinkle it evenly and generously over the cake batter. Bake until the top is lightly browned, the cake springs back when lightly pressed in the center, and a pick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Cool on a rack and dust with the confectioners' sugar. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Coffee cake basics

❖ Keep ingredients at room temperature. It's easier to blend them this way, with less risk of overmixing and ending up with a tough cake.

❖ Make sure the butter is softened so it's easier to beat in air. Along with baking powder, it's air bubbles that help leaven the cake and create a light texture.

❖ Measure your ingredients carefully, and weigh the dry ingredients. A common reason cake recipes don't turn out is because of imprecise measuring.

❖ Go easy on the mixing. Follow the recipe directions: "Mix until just incorporated" is meant to ensure a tender crumb.

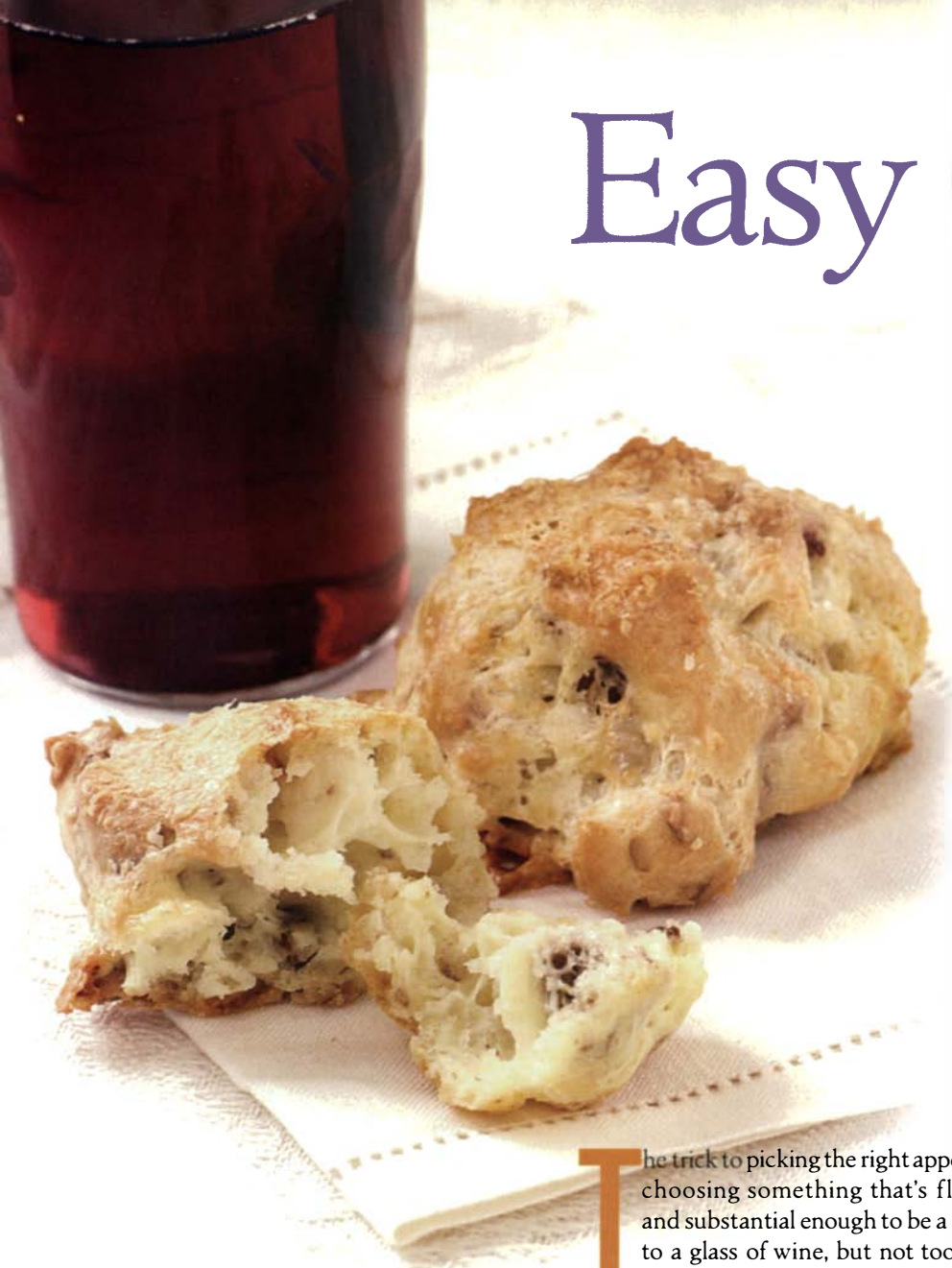
❖ Cool all cakes on a rack. This helps air circulate and will keep the cake from getting soggy on the bottom.

topped vanilla cake is a nostalgic favorite



Abigail Johnson Dodge
is a contributing editor
to Fine Cooking. ♦

Easy Cheddar



Adding cheese and nuts to a basic cream-puff dough gives you gougères, a sophisticated snack to serve with drinks

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

The trick to picking the right appetizer is choosing something that's flavorful and substantial enough to be a partner to a glass of wine, but not too filling. You do your guests (and yourself) a disservice by filling them up with rich stuff before they sit down to the real meal. I have an excellent solution: cheese pastry puffs called gougères. I learned this recipe fifteen years ago in cooking school, and it's become one of my signature dishes. Gougères are easy, delicious, and just a little bit different.

The dough for gougères (pronounced goo-ZHAIRZ) is a cream-puff dough, called choux pastry (pronounced SHOO), but here we're making it savory instead of sweet with the addition of cheese, nuts, and a little cayenne.

The method for the dough is very forgiving and actually pretty fun. You bring butter and water to a boil, beat in some flour, and then beat in eggs. The final addition is whatever cheese and nuts you choose.

Beating in the eggs takes a bit of muscle and a stiff wooden spoon, so when I'm feel-

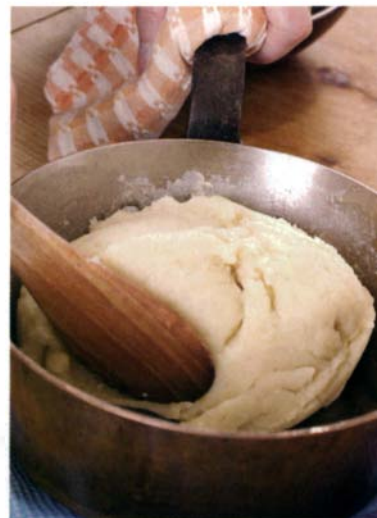
ing lazy, or if I'm making a big batch, I let my stand mixer do the stirring. I just take care not to overmix, which can make the texture of the final gougères a little cardboardy.

You can use a piping bag to shape the gougères, but I prefer to use a trigger-release mini ice-cream scoop or two spoons. Just be sure to keep the puffs all the same size so they bake evenly.

The only trick to baking gougères is to be sure to bake them enough. If they come out too soon, they'll collapse as they cool because their structure won't have fully set. They should be nicely browned all over, and the insides should be moist with a few "webs" of dough, but they shouldn't be too eggy.

Do-ahead tip: Make the dough a day ahead, keep it covered in the refrigerator, and then scoop and bake not more than an hour before serving so they're really fresh. They're still delicious when baked further ahead than that, but they tend to soften a bit. Gougères are great to serve with any kind of wine, especially Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Start with a simple



Flour, butter, and water come together in a ball that needs just a few minutes of beating before adding the eggs.

Pecan Puffs

ough made in a saucepan, scoop it, and bake until golden and fragrant



The dough starts out slippery, then gets satiny. After you add an egg, beat the dough until it goes through these two stages before adding the next egg.



When just right, the dough falls from the spoon in a heavy strand, which means it will stay mounded once you spoon it onto the baking sheet



A scoop (or two spoons) is quick, easier than using a pastry bag, and creates an appealing rustic look.



A good gougère has a deep golden color, which comes from sufficient time in the oven. An underbaked puff will be bland and will collapse too much.

Cheddar-Pecan Gougères

Yields about four dozen 2-inch puffs.

1½ cups water
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter,
cut into 4 chunks
1 teaspoon kosher salt
Pinch cayenne
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
7 ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
6 large eggs, cracked into a small
bowl; plus 1 more if needed
¾ cup lightly toasted chopped pecans
5 ounces grated very sharp Cheddar
(about 1½ cups, lightly packed)
¼ cup finely shredded Parmigiano
Reggiano

Position racks in the top and middle of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment.

In a medium heavy-based saucepan, heat the water, butter, salt, cayenne, and nutmeg over high, stirring to melt the butter. Bring to a boil and then dump in all the flour at once.

Take the pan off the heat and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until you get a smooth, thick paste. Put the pan back on the stove, reduce the heat to low, and stir another minute or so to cook off more moisture. The dough should start to form a shiny ball and pull away from the sides and bottom of the pan.

When the dough is dry enough, take the pan off the heat. (Transfer to a stand mixer bowl now, if using.) Pour in 1 egg and then beat until it's well blended and the dough is smooth again. Repeat five more times and then start to test the dough's consistency: it should fall from the spoon in a graceful "plop." If it seems too stiff, whisk up the last egg and add a bit of it and test again. (Note: if you're using a stand mixer, use the paddle attachment. Use only low speed and don't over-mix or the puffs will be tough.)

Add the pecans and Cheddar to the dough and carefully fold to dis-

tribute them. With a mini ice-cream scoop or two tablespoons, drop mounds about the size of a whole walnut shell onto the baking sheets, spaced about 1 inch apart. Sprinkle the shredded Parmigiano on top.

Bake in the heated oven until puffed, deep golden brown, and just barely moist inside, 25 to 30 minutes (you'll have to break one open to really check the doneness). Switch the positions of the baking sheets after 15 minutes for even baking. Transfer the gougères to a cooling rack. Repeat with any remaining dough. Serve when just barely warm or at room temperature.

VARIATION:

Roquefort & Walnut Gougères.

Substitute the same amount of walnuts for the pecans and 4 ounces crumbled Roquefort or other blue cheese for the Cheddar.

Martha Holmberg is Fine Cooking's editor in chief. ♦

Make and Freeze Your Secret

Make these impressive desserts weeks before the holiday rush—they all store beautifully in the freezer

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

One of my best strategies for hassle-free holiday baking is to make a few of my favorite desserts up to a month in advance and stow them in the freezer. You might not think it's possible to freeze something as elegant as a lemon tart, a mocha soufflé, or a flourless marble cake, but you'll be amazed—there's no sacrifice in taste or appearance when you freeze these desserts. And the great thing is, they're always just a thaw away—the easy solution to ending your holiday meal in style.

Follow a few rules for successful storing and thawing

Always, always cool the dessert completely before attempting to wrap it and freeze it. Wrapping a warm tart or cake will promote condensation and quickly lead to a soggy dessert and freezer burn. While the dessert is cooling to room temperature, I dig out a level niche in my freezer. The space doesn't have to be directly on the shelf, just a level area big enough to hold the rack or plate the dessert is on (I'm apt to use my boxes of frozen peas or artichoke hearts as levelers).

Then I set the cooled dessert—rack or plate and all—into the freezer and let it firm up; 20 to 30 minutes usually does the trick. This step makes handling and wrapping the



Straight from the oven, an impressive mocha soufflé doesn't need much dressing up, but a few raspberries and a pretty plate for the ramekin make a nice presentation.

dessert much easier. It will be firm but not frozen (so you can still get it off the plate), and plastic wrap won't stick and tear away the top.

Wrap it, then double-wrap it. Wrap the dessert in two layers of plastic wrap and slide it into a heavy duty zip-top bag. Zip the bag almost closed, leaving about one inch open. Gently push out as much air as possible. Insert a straw into the opening, zip the bag closed around the straw, and suck the air out

Dessert Stash



A slice of chocolate-vanilla marble cake is pretty all alone, but it's even more delicious with a dollop of brown-sugar whipped cream (see p. 20).



A drizzle of strawberry sauce (see p. 53) is an elegant garnish for this lemon tart; a few fresh raspberries would be sweet, too.

of the bag through the straw. The bag will shrink in toward the dessert. Quickly pull out the straw and zip up the bag. You might also try the new zip-top bags with double walls, designed especially to prevent freezer burn.

Thaw the desserts in the refrigerator or on the counter, depending on how much time you have. Given proper notice, I like to unwrap the cake or tart, set it on a serving plate, cover it loosely with plastic wrap, and let it thaw in the refrigerator. For a speedier

result, I'll proceed as above but I'll leave the dessert on the counter to warm up. And when I'm in a real bind, I even serve the lemon tart when it's still quite cold. It's surprisingly tasty and refreshing this way. The marble cake can also be served chilled, although I think the flavors are richer at room temperature. The mocha soufflés need little to no thawing. Just set them out on the counter while the oven is heating up and they're ready to bake.



Individual Mocha Soufflés

Yields 6 soufflés.

The great thing about these soufflés is that you *must* make them ahead so that they're chilled before they go in the oven. You can make and keep them in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours or you can freeze them for up to a month. If you plan to bake them the same day you make them, don't use the full 3 tablespoons of rum or brandy; rather, use only 1½ tablespoons of it plus 1½ tablespoons of water. Otherwise the alcohol flavor (which dissipates over time) will be too strong.

3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into pieces; more for the ramekins
Granulated sugar for dusting
3 tablespoons dark rum, brandy, Grand Marnier, or water
1½ teaspoons instant coffee granules
6 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
¼ teaspoon table salt
3 large eggs, separated and at room temperature
3 ounces (¾ cup) confectioners' sugar

Lightly butter six 6-ounce ramekins and dust with granulated sugar, tapping out excess. Set the ramekins on a small baking sheet.

Stir together the liquor or water and the instant coffee. Set aside and stir occasionally until the coffee is dissolved. Melt the chocolate and butter in a large metal bowl over a pan of simmering water or in a microwave. Remove from the heat and whisk until glossy and smooth. Stir in the coffee mixture and the salt. Whisk in the egg yolks, one at a time. Add about one-third of the confectioners' sugar and whisk until well blended and smooth. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, beat the egg whites with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until they're very foamy and they're just beginning to hold soft peaks. Increase the speed to high and gradually sprinkle in the remaining confectioners' sugar. Continue beating until the peaks are firm and glossy. Spoon about one-quarter of the beaten whites into the chocolate mixture and whisk until blended. Add the remaining whites and



Chill first, then cover. Before covering the ramekins, let them chill for 20 to 30 minutes. After that, the plastic will be less likely to stick to the soufflé batter.

gently fold them in until just blended. Pour evenly into prepared ramekins (the mixture will almost completely fill the ramekins). If you want to bake the soufflés within 24 hours, refrigerate them. (To refrigerate: Chill for about 30 minutes, and then cover in plastic and return to the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.) If you want to hold them for longer, freeze them according to the directions at right.

To bake straight from the refrigerator: Heat the oven to 400°F. Unwrap the ramekins, set them on a baking sheet, and bake until they're puffed and risen about 1 inch above the ramekin, 15 minutes. The top will still be slightly sunken in the center; consider it a place to pop in a few berries or a dollop of whipped cream. Remove the soufflés from the oven and serve immediately.

Freeze it, bake it,

Put the filled ramekins into the freezer, uncovered, for 20 minutes. Then wrap each ramekin well in plastic and freeze for up to two weeks. To bake straight from the freezer, unwrap the ramekins and set on a small baking sheet or jellyroll pan. Let them sit for 20 minutes while heating the oven to 400°F. Bake on the baking sheet until puffed and risen about 1 inch above the ramekin, 18 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve immediately.

Tip: Depending on how cold your freezer is, the soufflés may be slightly more or less done in 18 minutes. They'll be delicious either way. If they're a little underdone, they'll be a bit runny in the center; if a little overdone, they'll be a bit cakey in the center. It's best to stick to 18 minutes, as you don't want to use a method to test doneness that might deflate the soufflés. After you've made this recipe once in your own kitchen, you can adjust the timing as you like.



Lemon Tart

Serves ten to twelve.

Chill the tart dough for at least an hour or up to two days. If it has been in the refrigerator overnight, you may need to let it sit at room temperature for about 10 minutes until it's pliable enough to roll. Be sure the finished tart is fully cooled before wrapping well to freeze.

FOR THE CRUST:

4½ ounces (1 cup) all-purpose flour;
more for dusting
¼ cup confectioners' sugar
¼ teaspoon table salt
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) cold unsalted
butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon water

FOR THE FILLING:

¾ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
Pinch table salt
¾ cup strained fresh lemon juice (from
about 3 lemons)
3 large eggs, at room temperature
¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Make the crust: Combine the flour, confectioners' sugar, and salt in a food processor. Process briefly to blend. Add the chilled butter pieces and pulse until the butter is no bigger than small peas (about ¼ inch). Add the egg yolk and drizzle the water over the mixture. Pulse briefly until the dough forms a loose ball. Dump the dough onto a large piece of plastic wrap and shape into a flat disk about 4 inches in diameter. Wrap the dough and refrigerate until well chilled, at least 1 hour or up to two days.

Lightly dust your work surface and rolling pin with flour. Roll the chilled dough into a 12-inch round. Lift and turn the dough several times as you roll to prevent sticking; dust the work surface and the rolling pin with flour as needed. Use a dough scraper or a spatula to loosen the rolled dough; carefully roll it up around the pin and unroll it over a 9¼-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Gently fit it into the pan. Using lightly floured fingertips,

gently press the dough into the corners and against the sides of the tart pan. Run the rolling pin over the top of the pan to trim the dough so that it's level with the top of the pan. Cover and freeze until the tart shell is very firm, at least 30 minutes.

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Line the frozen crust with foil and fill it with pie weights or a mix of raw rice and dried beans. Put the crust in the oven and immediately reduce the oven temperature to 400°F. Bake until the sides are golden and the bottom no longer looks wet, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove the foil, rice, and beans. Prick the bottom of the crust lightly with a fork (but don't pierce through it) and continue to bake until the shell is golden brown, another 5 to 8 minutes. Set the pan on a wire rack to cool while you prepare the filling. Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F.

Make the filling and finish the tart: In a medium bowl, whisk together the sugar, flour, lemon zest, and salt. Pour in the lemon juice and whisk until blended and the sugar is dissolved. In a small bowl, lightly beat together the eggs and vanilla and then add to the lemon mixture. Whisk until just blended. (Don't overwhisk or the filling will have a foamy top when baked.)

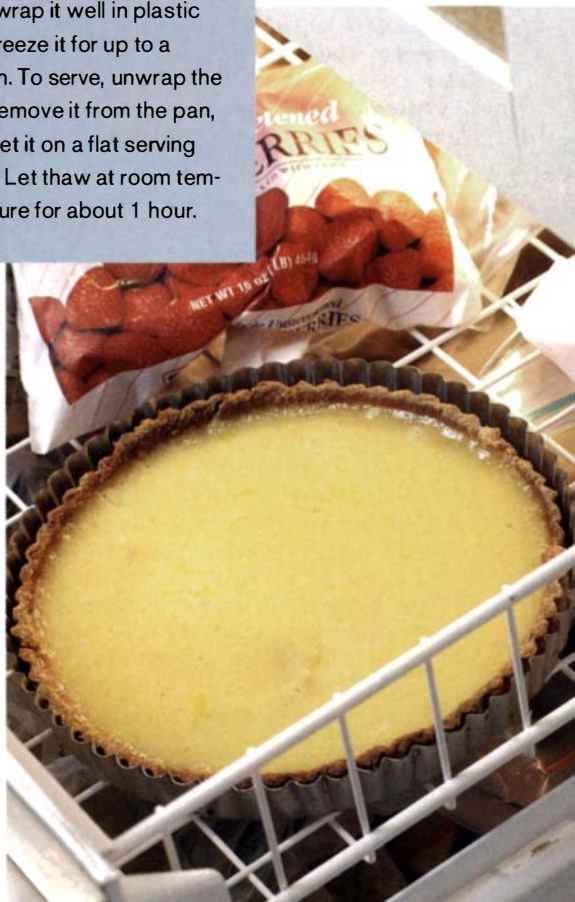
Pour the filling into the baked crust. Return the tart to the oven and bake until the filling jiggles slightly when the pan is nudged, about 20 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack until the tart is room temperature, about 1 hour. If not serving right away, chill it for 1 hour and then wrap it in plastic; refrigerate overnight or freeze (see the directions at right). If serving immediately, remove the outer ring and run a long metal spatula under the tart to loosen. Carefully slide the tart onto a flat serving plate.

Strawberry Sauce

Put 6 ounces frozen unsweetened strawberries (about 14 whole berries) in a food processor and pour ⅓ cup boiling water over them. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons granulated sugar and process until smooth. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve. This sauce pairs well with any of the desserts.

Freeze it, serve it

Let the tart cool in the pan to room temperature. Put the tart in the freezer for an hour to let it firm up, and then wrap it well in plastic and freeze it for up to a month. To serve, unwrap the tart, remove it from the pan, and set it on a flat serving plate. Let thaw at room temperature for about 1 hour.



Clear a little space in the freezer. Chill the lemon tart for an hour, and then wrap it well and return it to the freezer for up to a month.



Flourless Chocolate & Vanilla Marble Cake

Yields one 9½-inch cake; serves sixteen.

This dense, luscious cake has a texture a little like fudge and a little like cheesecake. A small slice goes a long way.

FOR THE VANILLA BATTER:

8 ounces cream cheese, softened to room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

FOR THE CHOCOLATE BATTER:

10 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
5 ounces (10 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
3 large eggs
½ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon dark rum or espresso
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch table salt

Cocoa powder for dusting

Position an oven rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Lightly grease a 9x2-inch round cake pan and line the bottom with parchment.

Make the vanilla batter: In a medium bowl, beat the softened cream cheese with an electric mixer until smooth. Add the sugar and continue beating until well blended and no lumps remain. Add the egg and vanilla and beat just until blended. Set aside.

Make the chocolate batter: In a medium bowl, melt the chocolate and butter in a large metal bowl over a pan of simmering water or in the microwave. Whisk until smooth and set aside to cool slightly. With a stand mixer fitted with the whip attachment (or with a hand mixer), beat the eggs, sugar, rum or espresso, vanilla, and salt on medium high until the mixture is pale and thick, 3 to 4 minutes. With the mixer on low, gradually pour in the chocolate mixture and continue beating until well blended.

Combine and bake: Spread about half of the chocolate batter in the bottom of the pan.



Sprinkle cocoa on the bottom of the cake before inverting it onto another plate; the cocoa will keep the cake from sticking when you slice and serve it.

Alternately add large scoopfuls of each of the remaining batters to the cake pan. Using a knife or the tip of a rubber spatula, gently swirl the two batters together so they're mixed but not completely blended. Rap the pan against the countertop several times to settle the batters.

Bake until a pick inserted about 2 inches from the edge comes out gooey but not liquid, 40 to 42 minutes; don't overbake. The top will be puffed and slightly cracked, especially around the edges. It will sink down as it cools. Let cool on a rack until just slightly warm, about 1½ hours. Loosen the cake from the pan by holding the pan almost perpendicular to the counter; tap the pan on the counter while rotating it clockwise. Invert onto a large flat plate or board. Remove the pan and carefully peel off the parchment. Sift some cocoa powder over the cake (this will make it easier to remove the slices when serving). Invert again onto a similar plate so that the top side is up. Let cool completely. Cover and refrigerate until very cold, at least 4 hours or overnight, or freeze (see the directions at right).

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

Freeze it, serve it

Wrap the cooled cake (unmolded as directed in the recipe) in plastic and refrigerate until firm and well chilled. Slide the cake from the plate and wrap it again in plastic. Freeze for up to a month. To serve, unwrap the cake and set it on a flat serving plate.

Cover with plastic wrap and thaw in the refrigerator overnight, or at room temperature for an hour or two.

Tip: To slice the marble cake neatly, use a hot knife (run it under hot running water and dry it). Wipe the blade clean between slices.

Crafting a Loaf of Challah



Beautiful and tender braided bread starts with an easy-to-handle dough

BY MAGGIE GLEZER

Challah is the bread traditionally served at the Jewish Sabbath, but why limit it to Friday night? Finely grained, eggy, and tender with a hint of honey flavor, challah is delicious anytime. Burnished and deep golden on the outside, it's one truly impressive loaf of bread. But this beautiful braid only looks difficult to make. The dough is hardy and forgiving, very little

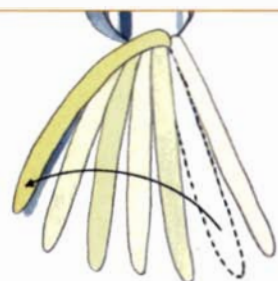
kneading is required, and the braiding involves just four repeating moves.

After years of baking challah, I've come up with a favorite version, as well as lots of pointers for the best possible bread.

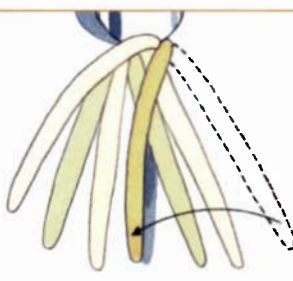
Use a flour that's slower in protein. You'll get a more tender result—the true mark of a homemade challah. I've had good luck with all-purpose unbleached flours, such as Pills-

Braiding is easy—it's just four repeating moves

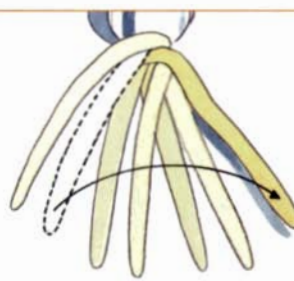
Arrange the strands parallel to one another. At one end, pinch the strands very tightly together and then weight the end with a heavy canister. Braid the strands closely.



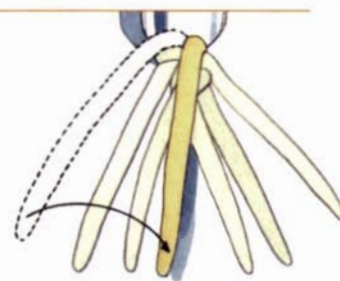
1 Move the second-to-the-right strand to the far-left position.



2 Move the far-right strand left over two strands, to the center position (spread the strands apart to make room).



3 Move the new second-to-the-left strand over to the far right position.



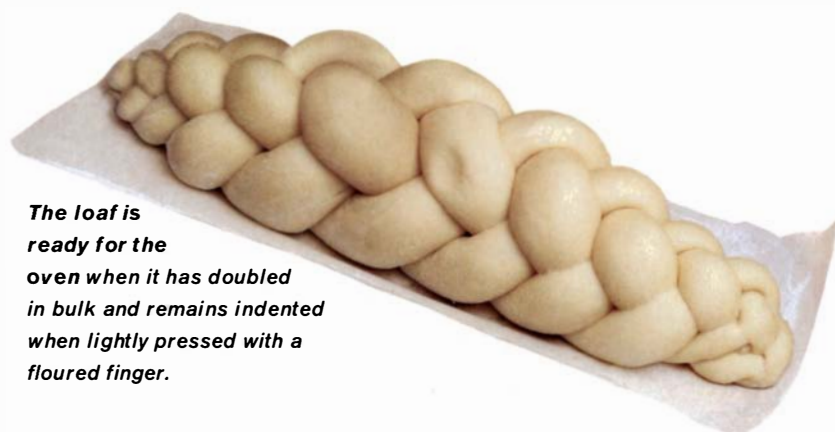
4 Move the far-left strand (the same strand you moved in step 1) over two strands to the center position. Now repeat the steps.

bury, Hecker's, and Gold Medal brands; they're lower in protein than bread flour, and they'll give a finer-grained, more cakelike bread. To find out about the protein content of the flour, check the side panel of the bag. It should list three grams of protein per serving.

The dough needs only two minutes of kneading because it gets worked heavily during shaping. The little kneading you will do doesn't demand a delicate turn of hand—on the contrary, just a bit muscle. If the dough is sticky, don't worry; just add a little more flour until it's firm. This stiff consistency actually helps the challah have a very finely grained texture and a very high profile with distinctive, separate strands. It will keep longer, too.

Rolling the strands creates a finely grained crumb. To shape the strands, you'll roll the dough into six flat pieces first, then roll up each piece like a carpet into a strand. This step is one of the secrets to a finely grained crumb—since air bubbles in the dough are subdivided under the pressure of the rolling pin—and marks the difference between an amateur and a professional-quality challah.

If you're not sure that the shaped loaf is ready to bake, let it proof a little longer. This isn't all right for all breads, but challah dough is very resilient. As you'll see in the photo at right, the dough is ready to bake when it remains indented after being gently pressed. Proofing (rising) time will vary a bit according to kitchen temperature.



The loaf is ready for the oven when it has doubled in bulk and remains indented when lightly pressed with a floured finger.

Challah

Yields 1 large loaf.

If you like, sprinkle poppy or sesame seeds onto the braid after brushing it with egg wash; both are traditional. To easily measure the honey, first measure the oil in a 1-cup measure. The oil will coat the cup and will let the honey just slip right out.

2 teaspoons instant yeast (Red Star Quick Rise, SAF Perfect Rise, Fleischmann's Rapid Rise or Fleischmann's Bread Machine Yeast)
16¾ ounces (3½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour (Hecker's, Gold Medal, or Pillsbury); more as needed
¼ cup warm water
3 large eggs
¼ cup vegetable oil

¼ cup honey
1½ teaspoons table salt

FOR THE GLAZE:
1 egg, lightly beaten
Sesame or poppy seeds for sprinkling (optional)

In a large bowl, mix the yeast with ½ cup of the flour. Add the warm water, stir, and let this mixture, called a sponge, sit until it starts to puff up, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the eggs, oil, honey, and salt; stir until well combined. The sponge will remain lumpy—this is fine. Add the remaining flour and mix the dough in the bowl until all the ingredients are combined. Turn the dough out onto a work surface and knead until fairly smooth, about 2 minutes. The dough should feel very firm and will be hard to

knead. If it's soft and sticky, add more flour until it's very firm. Transfer the dough to a large, clean container and cover it well. Let it rise until doubled in bulk and very soft to the touch, about 2 hours, depending on room temperature. Line an insulated baking sheet with parchment or oiled foil. If you don't have an insulated sheet, stack two sheets together (this keeps the bottom of the bread from overbrowning during baking).

To shape the dough: Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and sprinkle a little more flour over it. Spread and flatten the dough a bit, but don't worry about punching it down. Cut it into six equal

Timing tips

You needn't rush to make this recipe all in one day. It's fine to mix the dough the night before, refrigerate it right after mixing, and then finish it in the next 24 hours.

You can also mix the dough, let it rise, shape it, and then cover it well with plastic wrap to prevent crusting, and refrigerate it for up to 24 hours. When you're ready to bake it, take it out of the refrigerator, let it finish proofing (it will take at least one additional hour), and then bake it.

You can double, triple, and even quadruple the ingredients without incident, using a big food processor or kneading by hand. Fully baked challah freezes beautifully, but the dough doesn't.



pieces. Set aside the dough pieces, cover them lightly with plastic, and brush all the flour off the work surface. Have a small bowl of water handy. Using no flour, roll a piece of dough with a rolling pin into a very thin sheet, between $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick (don't worry about making a rectangle; an amoeba-type shape is fine). The dough may stick to the work surface; this is all right—just nudge it gently with a dough scraper. Tightly roll up the sheet like a carpet to form a strand. Roll the strand back and forth between your hands until it's thin, very even, and 12 to 15 inches long. At the ends of the strand, angle the outer edge of your hands into the work surface as you're rolling to make the

ends pointy and the strand thicker in the middle (This will help you get a football-shaped loaf). The strand needs to grip the work surface slightly during this rolling; the "grab" will help as you roll. If the strand is too slick, very lightly dampen it with water to help it grip the work surface better. Repeat the rolling out, rolling up, and elongating steps with the remaining five pieces of dough, rolling them out to the same length. Lightly sprinkle all the strands with flour to prevent them from sticking to one another during proofing. Arrange the strands parallel to one another. At one end, gather and pinch the strands very tightly together. Weight the end with a heavy canister to keep the

braid from moving and to leave your hands free, and braid closely, following the illustrations at left. Lightly tap each end of the loaf with your palms to tuck it under the loaf.

Transfer the braid to the lined baking sheet and cover it loosely but thoroughly with plastic wrap. Let proof until doubled in bulk and the loaf remains indented when lightly pressed, about 2 hours, depending on room temperature. (If in doubt, let the dough proof more rather than less.)

To bake: Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Just before baking, brush the dough with the beaten egg. Sprinkle with

sesame seeds or poppy seeds, if using. With a thin wooden skewer, poke the bread deeply all over (the holes will prevent air pockets and help the bread keep its shape during baking). Bake for 20 minutes. Rotate the challah 180 degrees and bake until the bread is a dark, burnished brown, about another 15 minutes. (If the challah is browning too rapidly cover it loosely with foil and let it finish baking. Don't remove the loaf too soon, as you'll risk underbaking.) Let cool thoroughly on a rack.

Maggie Glezer is the author of Artisan Baking Across America, which won a James Beard award in 2001. She's at work on a book about challah. ♦

This delicious bread disappears quickly. But if there's any left over, save it for breakfast: day-old challah makes divine French toast.

Biscotti

These delicious and great-looking Italian cookies stay fresh for weeks, so they're perfect for holiday gifts

BY KATHLEEN WEBER

What makes my heart sing are things rustic: long-simmering braises, hearth-style bread, and the traditional Italian cookies known as biscotti. Many years ago, I started giving biscotti as gifts, and it has become a yearly holiday ritual.

There are a couple of reasons why biscotti are such keepers in my repertoire. They're an inventive departure from more Christmasy-looking cookies, while still being sparkly, festive, and full of delicious nuggets like hazelnuts, candied ginger, and chocolate chunks. Plus, biscotti are smart little cookies: sturdy enough to travel well, arriving at their destination unbroken and as delicious and fragrant as the day you baked them.

If you've ever eaten one of those bland wedges labeled "biscotti" at an espresso shop or a bookstore, let me tell you now that mine are entirely different—the recipes that follow will convince you of that. And if you already love biscotti, these could be the best you've ever tasted. In any case, I've come up with three irresistible versions: chocolate, almond, and a rustic currant-raisin that's low-fat and lovely dunked in tea, coffee, and even red wine—a personal favorite.



Biscotti Rustica. “I like to cut these diagonally into long rusks, but if you want, cut the logs crosswise to make a larger amount of smaller biscotti,” says Kathleen Weber.

Vary the size and yield as you please

The width of a log of biscotti dough will determine the length of your finished cookie. I've chosen the sizes that I think work best for my recipes, but you can vary this according to your preference. (The thinner the slices, the bigger the yield, of course.) These biscotti are thick enough to withstand shipping, but if you're not sending them anywhere, you can cut them as thin as $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and reduce the baking time slightly.

Shape once, bake twice

To make biscotti, mix and shape the dough, bake it, slice it, and bake again until the cookies are crisp.



Biscotti Rustica

Yields about three dozen 6-inch-long cookies.

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried currants
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup golden raisins
2 tablespoons brandy
Grated zest of 1 lemon (to yield about 1 tablespoon)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce (1 tablespoon) crystallized ginger, chopped
2 cups granulated sugar
 $15\frac{3}{4}$ ounces ($3\frac{1}{2}$ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup yellow cornmeal
1 tablespoon baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt
3 large eggs
3 large egg yolks
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pine nuts, toasted until golden

FOR THE GLAZE:

1 egg white, lightly beaten
1 tablespoon turbinado sugar (also sold as Sugar in the Raw in supermarkets)

Mix the dough.

In a small bowl, combine the currants, raisins, brandy, lemon zest, and ginger and let stand for 20 minutes. With an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, granulated sugar, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg yolks, and vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, add the egg mixture to the dry ingredients until just combined and the dough looks crumbly. Take care not to overmix. Add the fruit mixture and the pine nuts, mixing just until the dough comes together (bring the dough together with your hands if it's a bit stiff). Let the dough rest for 15 to 30 minutes before shaping.

Meanwhile, position oven racks in the middle and top of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Shape the dough and do the initial baking.

Line a large baking sheet with parchment. Cut the dough in half. Using as little flour as possible on the work surface, roll each half into a log that's 16 inches long and 2 inches wide, working out the air pockets as you go. (If you're working ahead, wrap the logs in plastic and refrigerate them overnight). Transfer the logs to the baking sheet, setting them about 3 inches apart and patting the sides to smooth and straighten. Brush the tops and sides with the beaten egg white and sprinkle with the turbinado sugar. Bake on the middle rack until golden brown and firm in the center, 30 to 35 minutes, rotating the sheet to ensure even baking. Set the sheet on a rack until the logs are cool enough to handle and so the dough won't compress when you cut it, about 30 minutes.

Slice the baked loaf before baking a second time.

Reduce the oven temperature to 300°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment. With a serrated knife, saw the logs into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick slices, cutting on the diagonal so each slice is about 6 inches long. Lay the slices flat on the baking sheets. Bake about 15 minutes, rotating the sheets and switching their positions as needed for even baking. Turn the biscotti over. Bake until both sides are a rich golden brown, another 10 to 15 minutes. Set the baking sheets on racks, letting the cookies cool and crisp completely on the sheets. If stored airtight, the biscotti will keep for about two weeks.



Golden Almond Biscotti

Yields about six dozen 3-inch cookies.

2 cups whole skin-on almonds
20 ounces (4¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup turbinado sugar (also sold as Sugar in the Raw in supermarkets)
½ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup finely grated orange zest (from 3 to 4 oranges)
2 teaspoons anise seeds, crushed
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, cut into pieces, well chilled
4 large eggs
¼ cup strained fresh orange juice
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon pure almond extract

FOR THE GLAZE:

2 egg whites, beaten until slightly foamy
6 tablespoons turbinado sugar (see note above)

Mix the dough.

Position oven racks in the middle and top of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Toast the almonds on a baking sheet until the skins just start to crack, about 15 minutes. Spread them on a cutting board to cool.

Roughly chop them (each nut should only be cut into two or three pieces; it's easier to chop them evenly if you work in small mounds). With an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the turbinado sugar, granulated sugar, orange zest, and anise seeds until well combined. Add this mixture to the flour mixture; mix to combine. With the mixer on low speed, add the chilled butter, mixing until the pieces are the size of large peas. In a small bowl, whisk together the eggs, orange juice, vanilla extract, and almond extract and add to the dough, mixing until just combined and being careful not to overmix. Add the almonds and mix for a few seconds to blend. The dough will feel sticky. Let it rest for 15 to 30 minutes before shaping.

Shape the dough and do the initial baking.

Line two large baking sheets with parchment. Cut the dough into quarters. Using as little flour as possible on your work surface, roll each quarter into a log that's 13 inches long and 1½ inches wide, working out the air pockets as you go. (If you're working ahead, wrap the logs in plastic and refrigerate them overnight.) Set the logs on the lined baking sheets, about 3 inches apart, patting the sides to straighten and smooth. Brush the tops and sides with the beaten egg whites and sprinkle the tops with 2 tablespoons of the turbinado sugar. Bake until golden brown and firm in the center, about 35 minutes, rotating the sheets and switching their positions to ensure even baking. Set the sheets on racks until the logs are cool enough to handle and so the dough won't compress when you cut it, about 30 minutes.

Bake a second time.

Reduce the oven to 300°F and line the baking sheets with fresh parchment, if needed. With a serrated knife, saw the logs into ½-inch-thick slices, cutting crosswise. Lay the slices flat on the baking sheets. Brush the tops with more egg white and sprinkle with another 2 tablespoons of the turbinado sugar. Bake about 15 minutes, rotating the baking sheets and switching their positions as needed. Turn the biscotti over. Brush again with the egg whites and sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar. Bake until both sides are a rich golden brown, another 10 to 15 minutes. Set the baking sheets on racks to let the cookies cool and crisp completely on the sheets. If stored airtight, the biscotti will keep for about two weeks.

Do the first bake and then finish the cookies as your schedule permits. Half-baked biscotti can sit as long as overnight.



VARIATION: For a more intense chocolate flavor in the recipe below, I replace the chocolate and cocoa with a 9.7-ounce bar of Scharffen Berger 62% semi-sweet chocolate along with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup each Scharffen Berger nibs and cocoa (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86). I also like to make my own candied orange peel. For a version of this recipe using homemade candied orange peel, visit www.finecooking.com. —K. W.

Chocolate-Orange Biscotti

Yields about ten dozen 2½-inch cookies.

FOR THE DOUGH:

- 2½ cups whole skin-on hazelnuts**
- 12 ounces high-quality bitter-sweet or semisweet chocolate**
- 8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature**
- 4 large eggs**
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract**
- ½ teaspoon almond extract**
- 2 tablespoons instant espresso powder or finely ground coffee**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup high-quality Dutch-processed cocoa powder, sifted**
- 1 cup candied orange peel (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86)**
- 18 ounces (4 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**

FOR FINISHING:

- 4 egg whites**
- 1 teaspoon best-quality orange extract (try Simply Organic orange flavor)**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar**

Mix the dough.

Position oven racks in the middle and top of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Toast the hazelnuts on a baking sheet until they're well browned, about 10 minutes. Let cool. You won't need to skin them—the skins taste great—but if the nuts are bigger than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, chop them roughly. Chop the chocolate into slivers that are a scant 1 inch long and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide.

With an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium-high speed until light and creamy. Add the eggs one at a time. Add the brown and white sugars, vanilla extract, almond extract, espresso powder, and cocoa powder, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the candied orange peel, flour, baking powder, and salt. Add the hazelnuts and chocolate slivers, mixing just to combine. The dough will be stiff and a bit sticky. Let the dough rest for 15 to 30 minutes before shaping.

Shape the dough and do the initial baking.

Line two large baking sheets with parchment. Divide the dough into six equal pieces. Using as little flour as possible on the work surface, roll each piece into logs that are 12 to 14 inches long and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide, working out the air pockets as you go. (If you're working ahead, wrap the logs in plastic wrap and refrigerate them overnight). Transfer the logs to the lined baking sheets, setting the dough about 3 inches apart, patting the sides to smooth and straighten. In a small bowl, beat the egg whites with the orange extract until foamy. Brush the tops and sides of the logs with some of the whites. Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the sugar. Bake until firm in the center, about 35 minutes, rotating the sheets to ensure even baking. Set the sheets on racks until the logs are cool enough to handle and so the dough won't compress when you cut it, about 30 minutes.

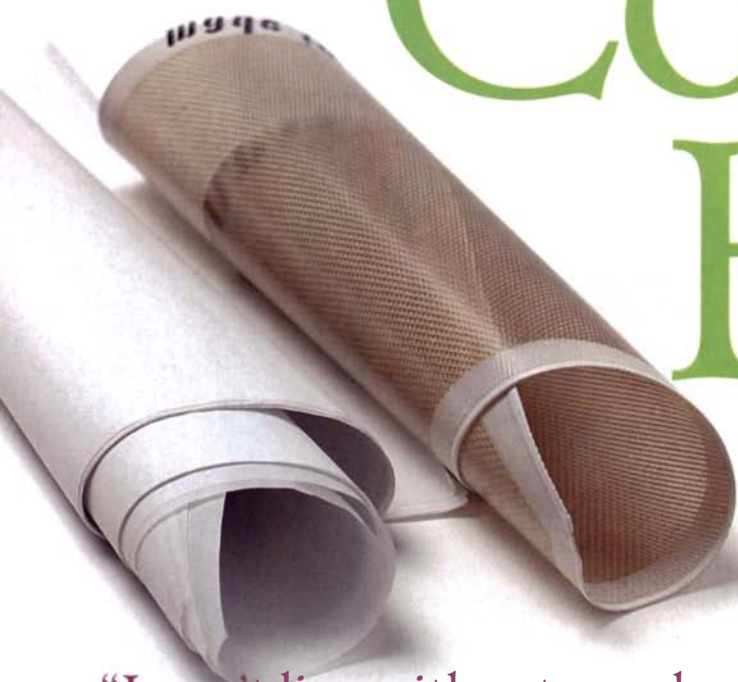
Bake the second time.

Reduce the oven to 300°F and line the baking sheets with fresh parchment, if needed. With a serrated knife, saw the strips into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch-thick slices, cutting crosswise. Lay the slices flat on the baking sheets. Brush the tops with the beaten egg white and sprinkle with another $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the sugar. Bake about 15 minutes, rotating the baking sheets as needed. Turn the biscotti over. Brush again with the egg white and sprinkle with the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar. Bake another 10 to 15 minutes, watching carefully to make sure the chocolate doesn't burn. The centers will feel somewhat soft even when fully baked; they'll harden as the cookies cool. Set the baking sheets on racks, letting the cookies cool and crisp completely on the sheets. If stored airtight, the biscotti will keep for about two weeks.

Kathleen Weber is the proprietor of Della Fattoria, the Weber family bakery in Petaluma, California. ♦

Gearing Up for Cookie Baking

BY JUSTIN SCHWARTZ



“I can’t live without parchment.”

I line every cookie sheet with parchment, even if the recipe suggests baking on an ungreased sheet, as many chocolate-chip cookie recipes do. I never have to worry about sticking, and clean-up is easy. And if I have to use the same pan for subsequent batches, I just slide the parchment with the baked cookies off onto a rack for cooling and then slide a new sheet with raw dough right onto the pan.”

—Dede Wilson, author of *Christmas Cooking for Dummies* and *Appetizers for Dummies*

Parchment is affordable, and you can buy it in rolls that will fit the width of half sheet pans. Even better, King Arthur Flour’s Baker’s Catalogue sells parchment in already-cut rectangular sheets.

A reusable alternative to parchment, Silpat **silicone baking mats** are amazing. They’re a breeze to clean and will supposedly last for 2,000 uses. (That’s a lot of cookies, but I haven’t yet seen a worn-out Silpat.) Matfer makes an almost identical product; both brands are imported from France. I’ve tested them side by side, and both work flawlessly. If you use one of these silicone mats, be aware that they retain heat much longer than parchment and handle them with oven mitts to be safe. And they’re not cheap. They cost as much as or even more than most high-quality cookie sheets, and for serious baking you’ll need at least two mats. Four would be even better.

During the holidays, I’ve been accused of getting carried away with cookies, but who’s to say that baking five batches in one night is too much? If you’re planning to bake up a storm this year, I have some advice for you: Before you get started, before you even start fantasizing about which recipes to make, take inventory of your cookie baking equipment. You don’t need a lot for cookies, but having the right type of pans and gadgets can really make a difference in efficiency and in the quality of your final cookies.

To get myself ready for the season, I consulted with some of the country’s best baking experts and came up with this guide. For sources, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86.

“My new best friends are mini ice-cream scoops

for scooping uniform-size cookies. They make it easy for kids to have success in the kitchen, too.”

—Gale Gand, executive pastry chef and partner of Tru in Chicago, cookbook author, and host of the Food Network's *Sweet Dreams*

If you've ever made a tray of cookies and found that some are over-baked and others are under-baked, this tool may be the solution. Uniformly scooped cookies will bake up evenly every time—no more feeding the burned cookies to the dog. Just scoop the dough and use the lever on the handle to plop the ball directly onto the cookie sheet. The Baker's Catalogue sells scoops in teaspoon and tablespoon sizes.



“Oven thermometers ensure accurate baking temperatures,

critical with most cookies. You can't rely on the oven's temperature gauge.”

—Marcel Desaulniers, author of *Death by Chocolate*



“I rely on my angled offset spatula for holiday cookie baking.

I use it to make sure that my dough doesn't stick to the counter when I'm rolling it out, and then to transfer cut cookies to baking sheets.”

—Lauren Chattman, author of *Mom's Big Book of Baking* and *Icebox Pies*

Do you avoid making rolled cookies? They can be tricky because of their butter-rich dough, especially as the kitchen starts to warm up. A simple solution is an angled offset spatula. I like Ateco spatulas: they're angled just right for ease of use, and the blade is extra thin to minimize damage to delicate cookies. Just don't forget to prepare your cookie sheets as directed before you start shaping your cookies. And, of course, use the spatula to transfer the finished cookies from the baking sheet to the cooling rack.



You probably know that older ovens with dial controls have always been prone to less-than-accurate results, and unfortunately, you can't totally rely on your oven's gauge, even if you have a newer oven that features a digital thermostat. If your oven is too hot or too cold, it doesn't matter if you're using the very best brand of cookie sheet and watching the kitchen timer like a hawk. Fortunately, oven thermometers are affordable and available everywhere. Hang one on your oven's middle rack, set the oven's thermostat to 350°F, and wait for at least 30 minutes. Check the thermometer (leave the oven door closed and turn on the oven light for the most accurate results) and don't be surprised if it's off by 25 degrees or more—just adjust your oven controls accordingly. Check the thermometer every time you bake, just to be safe. For more on calibrating your oven, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 73.

“There’s nothing like a good-quality, professional bench scraper

for cutting, cleaning, and even shaping doughs. Go down to a restaurant-supply store and get one with a nice thin blade. You’ll save money and get a good quality tool, too.”

—Wayne Harley Brachman, author of *Retro Desserts* and host of the Food Network’s *Melting Pot*

A bench scraper is indispensable. If there isn’t a restaurant-supply store in your area, look for scrapers in kitchenware stores. If you’re making lots of rolled or refrigerator cookies, your scraper will get plenty of use scraping up bits of dough, shaping and cutting blocks of dough, and slicing refrigerated dough logs into cookies. I like

stainless-steel models with rolled handles for durability, but Oxo makes one with a comfortable rubber handle, plus it has a ruler on the blade so you can measure cookie sizes and dough thicknesses.

Speaking of measuring, I thought [measuring spoons](#) were measuring spoons until I saw these from

Cuisipro, which are cleverly designed to sit on the counter-top without tipping over. That means you can set a tablespoon down on any flat surface, add vanilla extract, and let it just sit

there until you’re ready to add it to the batter. If you’re using a hand mixer or mixing by hand, having your ingredients measured and ready is essential. Also handy are [irregular-size measuring cups and spoons](#) from Amco. These 18/8 stainless-steel cups are sold in a set of $\frac{2}{3}$ -, $\frac{3}{4}$ -, and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup measures. I find that I use my odd-size cups even more than my standard ones.



“I would find it hard to live without my KitchenAid 5-quart mixer.

It’s more than 22 years old and has never skipped a beat. I can mix anything quickly and easily in it. I can’t imagine making cookies without it.”

—Carole Bloom, author of *Cookies for Dummies* and *Chocolate Lover’s Cookbook for Dummies*

Carole’s sentiment is most likely universal among avid bakers. You just turn the mixer on and let it do all the work while your hands are free to get the next ingredient ready, prep the cookie sheets, or start cleaning up. The rotary action of the mixer ensures that all your ingredients are properly combined, so you don’t waste so much time stopping the mixer to scrape down the sides of the bowl (although on some models, you do need to scrape down to the very bottom to be sure those ingredients get incorporated correctly). The heaviness of a stand mixer means you don’t have to worry about the machine “walking” on the counter.

But size does matter. KitchenAid’s 4½- and 5-quart stand mixers were the standard for decades. You can find 250-watt, 4½-quart models in most department stores, and the 300-watt Ultra Power models are available in gorgeous colors to coordinate with your kitchen décor.

You may find that you need a bigger mixing bowl, especially when you’re baking double batches of cookies for the holidays. KitchenAid now makes two mixers that come with a 6-quart bowl—the 475-watt Epicurean and the 525-watt Professional. These heavy-duty mixers are worth the extra expense if you do a lot of baking. If you need something even larger, the 650-watt Kenwood KM800 Major Classic stand mixer has a 7-quart bowl.

One last suggestion about stand mixers—buy an extra bowl. If you’re baking more than one batch of cookies, or making sandwich cookies, you’ll save a lot of time if you don’t have to wash out the bowl every time you need a clean one.



“Sturdy baking sheets are always important,

but never more so than during holiday baking time, when my oven cranks out tons of cookies. I love Doughmakers baking sheets. They have that wonderful pebbled surface for even browning, and the coined edge makes them super-sturdy—there’s no warping.”

—Abigail Johnson Dodge, *Fine Cooking* contributing editor and author of *Williams-Sonoma Desserts*

Abby added that Doughmakers’ “great grand” size (14x20 inches) is probably too big for most home ovens. The “grand” is the size of a standard half sheet pan (14x17 inches), and the biscuit size (10x14 inches) is handy, too. After her rave review, I had to try them myself. My cookies slid right off, as if I’d used parchment or a silicone baking mat. Most nonstick pans have a sprayed-on coating that scratches easily and wears out over time, and cheaper pans will rust when the surface is scratched and the steel interior is exposed. (Avoid at all costs the cheap pans sold in supermarkets.) Doughmakers’ pans are made of aluminum, so they won’t rust. The pebbled surface also allows air to get beneath the cookies, so they brown more evenly than with most pans.

Of course, if you use parchment or silicone mats, many brands of high-quality cookie sheets will suffice. I recommend Chicago Metallic’s Commercial pans. They’re built to the highest standards, and they offer a good value for your dollar, too. Jellyroll-style sheet pans have a wire rod inside the rolled edges to prevent warping, and their terrific heat conductivity ensures even baking.

“Cookie cutters are a holiday essential.

I have more than a hundred of them, because there’s nothing more fun than biting off the head of a gingerbread camel or the points off a shortbread star. And whimsical shapes are, of course, an excuse to use brightly colored sugars and sprinkles.”

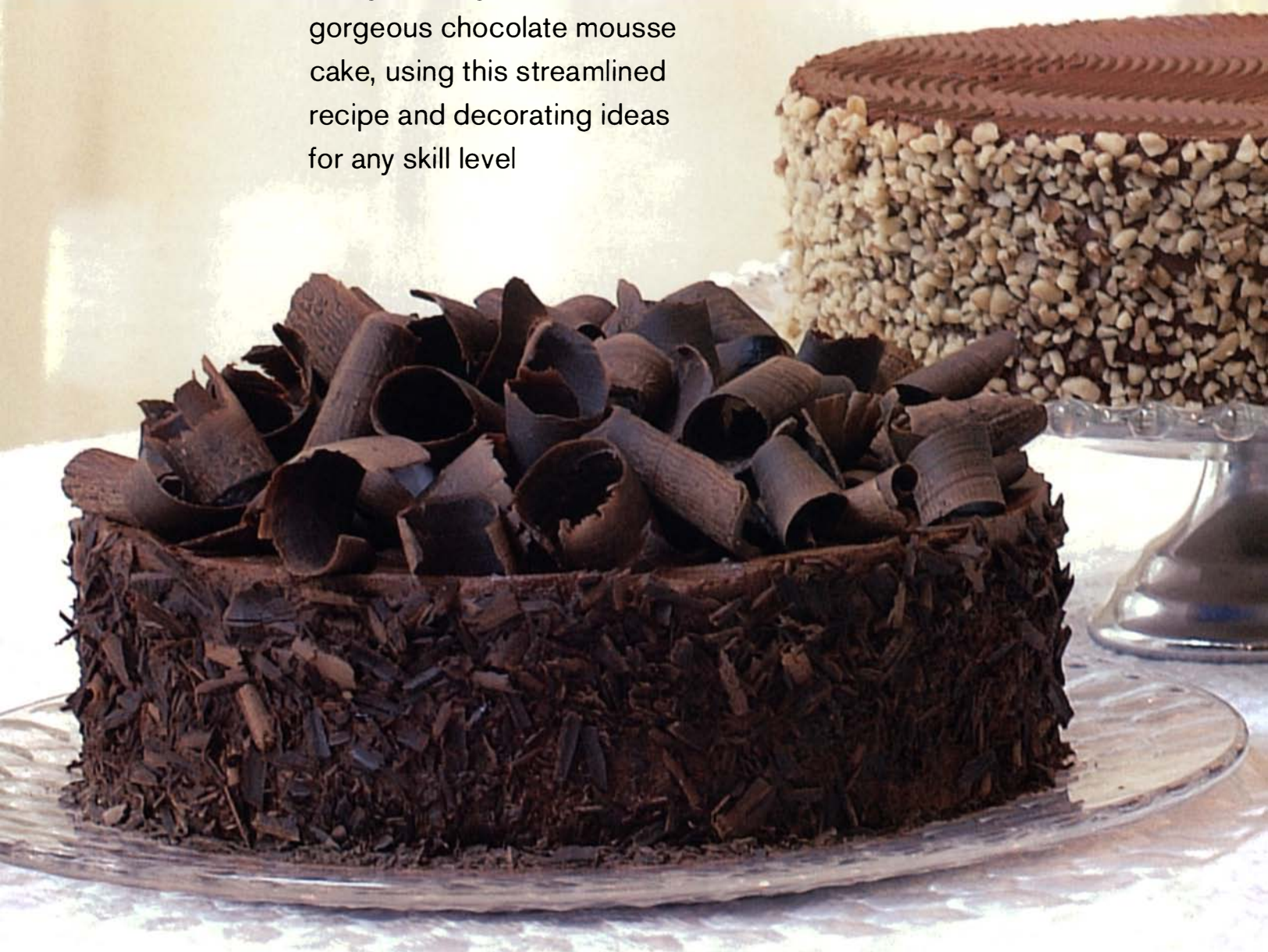
—Carolyn Beth Weil, baker, instructor, and co-author of *The Baker’s Dozen Cookbook*

I have wonderful memories of baking cookies with my mother when I was a kid. Now, baking cookies with my daughter and sharing them with friends and family is our own holiday tradition. We have a large assortment of cookie cutters, but my daughter is a big fan of our Wilton cookie press. I make dozens and dozens of cookies in all different shapes with the press, and she’s in charge of decorations. Don’t forget to stock up on the **sprinkles**, **sugar crystals**, and other cookie toppings, and start some holiday traditions of your own this year. Have some fun while you’re at it. (See the foldout cookie guide in this issue, p. 18.)

Justin Schwartz, formerly a cookbook editor, is a freelance writer, editor, and photography art director. ♦

A Spectacular Chocolate Mousse in Three Costumes

Yes, you really can make this gorgeous chocolate mousse cake, using this streamlined recipe and decorating ideas for any skill level



BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Cake



As a professional baker, I've made some pretty complicated desserts—fancy cakes that would have been formidable projects without my years of baking experience and a kitchen full of specialty tools.

And yet, I firmly believe that spectacular homemade desserts should be within reach of any enthusiastic home baker, regardless of the person's baking expertise. With that in mind, I set out to create a drop-dead delicious chocolate mousse cake that any avid home cook can make. This cake doesn't require any special equipment, and you can bake, assemble, and decorate it over the course of several days. I'm giving three options for dressing it up; review the instructions on pp. 70-71 to decide which is right for you. Beginners might want to stick with the simple, clean look of

chopped nuts on the sides, but many cooks will find the next choice—chocolate shavings and curls—to be much easier than it looks. If you're a baking pro, you might want to tackle the dramatic chocolate bands with white chocolate curls. Whichever way you go, the cake will be delicious, your guests will be thrilled, and you'll feel like a genius.

You can bake, assemble, and decorate the cake in stages

Start by baking the chocolate cake. It can be wrapped in plastic and kept at room temperature for a day or frozen for up to a month. One day before serving, make the mousse and assemble the cake; it can be held for a day in the fridge. Decorate the cake the day of serving, using one of the ideas on pp. 70-71.

Chocolate Mousse Layer Cake

Yields one 9-inch cake; serves twelve.

FOR THE CHOCOLATE CAKE:

Vegetable oil or pan spray for the pan
Flour for the pans

6 ounces (1½ cups) cake flour
1 ounce (6 tablespoons) unsweetened natural cocoa powder
2 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 cup granulated sugar
¼ cup vegetable oil
1 large egg
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup water

8 cups Chocolate Mousse (recipe at right)

FOR THE DECORATION:

See pp. 70-71

To make the cake: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease a 9x2-inch round cake pan, line the bottom with parchment, and flour the sides (but not the bottom).

Sift the cake flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt into a large bowl. Add the sugar and whisk until well blended. Measure the oil into a 1-cup liquid measure, add the egg and vanilla, and mix with a fork to blend. Add the egg-oil mixture to the dry ingredients and then add the water. Whisk until the dry ingredients are just moist, about 1 minute, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake until a pick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean, 32 to 34 minutes. Let cool on a rack for 20 minutes. Lightly grease a wire rack, invert the cake onto it, lift off the pan, peel off the paper, and let the cake cool completely.

To assemble the cake: Set the ring of a 9-inch springform pan on a large, flat cake plate. To cut the cake into layers, it helps if the cake is slightly chilled. Set the cake bottom side up on a parchment-lined work surface. Cut into three equal layers **1**. Set aside without separating the layers.

Make the chocolate mousse using the recipe at right.

Gently flip the top cake layer (really the bottom) upside down and center it in the springform ring so the mousse can flow over the edge to frost the sides; handle



the cake carefully (if it breaks, just piece it together). Scoop about one-third of the mousse (a heaping 2 cups) onto the cake layer in the ring and gently spread to cover **2**. Flip the next cake layer (the center) on top of the mousse and press gently to level it, if necessary. Scoop half of the remaining mousse over the layer and spread gently. Flip the remaining cake layer upside down and set it on top of the mousse. Press gently to level it. Spread on the remaining mousse and smooth the top; the cake should fill the ring (don't worry if a little mousse leaks out of the bottom). If you're decorating the cake with nuts and want to make a wavy top, do so now by following the instructions on p. 70. Put the cake in the fridge for at least 6 hours and up to 24.

To decorate: Take the cake from the fridge. Run a long, thin knife or metal spatula under hot water and dry it well. Slide the warm knife between the cake and the



cut

Choose your longest serrated knife. Place the section of the blade near the handle one-third of the way down the side of the cake (use a ruler, follow the tip below, or else eyeball it). With a firm, slow sawing motion, cut around the cake at this level. Focus on where the blade enters the cake (not the knife tip). When you've made a full circle and cut through the layer, place the knife two-thirds of the way down the cake and repeat, creating three layers in all.



tip: If you've never cut cake layers before, use two toothpicks to divide the cake into three equal layers. Do this at four points around the cake. Cut the cake as explained above, using the picks as guides.

ring, pressing the knife against the ring, to loosen the cake. Carefully release the springform clasp; gently pry it all the way open. Lift off the ring and clean the plate edge. If you're decorating the cake with nuts or chocolate shavings, mold strips of foil around the cake plate to keep it clean.

If the cake's sides have bare patches, use a small metal spatula to touch them up with some of the reserved mousse. Chill the cake.

Follow the decorating instructions for one of the ideas on pp. 70-71. Once decorated, keep the cake refrigerated and serve it within 8 hours. Remove from the fridge 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Here's how.

Chocolate Mousse

Yields 8 cups.

Before you start the mousse, have the three layers of cake ready.

2 cups heavy cream

¾ ounce (¼ cup) unsweetened natural cocoa powder

13 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped

4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature and cut into small pieces

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract or 1 to 2 tablespoons brandy or Cointreau

Pinch table salt

7 large egg whites, at room temperature*

½ cup granulated sugar

Set up an ice bath by partially filling a large bowl with cold water and some ice.

Combine the cream and cocoa in a large saucepan set over medium heat. Bring to a full boil, whisking occasionally to blend in the cocoa. Slide the pan off the heat and immediately add the chopped chocolate and the butter; whisk slowly until melted and smooth.

Scrape the chocolate mixture into a large bowl. Add the vanilla and salt. Set over the ice bath and stir constantly with a rubber spatula, scraping the sides very frequently, until the chocolate cools to room temperature (don't stop stirring or lumps will form) **1**. Remove the bowl from the ice bath.

Put the whites in a large clean bowl. Whip with an electric mixer on medium-low speed until very foamy. Increase the speed to medium high and beat until the whites form very loose, soft peaks. Slowly add the sugar. Continue beating until the whites are shiny and form floppy peaks **2**.

Working quickly, scoop about a third of the whites into the cooled chocolate mixture and fold together with a rubber spatula or a whisk until blended **3**. Scrape the remaining whites into the chocolate and fold together gently but thoroughly. Scoop out about 1 cup of the mousse into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate for finishing touchups. Use the rest of the mousse to assemble the cake.

*If you're concerned about uncooked egg whites, you can use a pasteurized egg white product like Just Whites (see Where to Buy It, p. 86).



cool

WHEN COOLING THE CHOCOLATE OVER THE ICE BATH, stir constantly for a smooth consistency. Scrape the sides frequently with a rubber spatula, as the chocolate there is quick to set and can cause lumps.



beat

BEFORE BEATING THE WHITES, be sure your beater and bowl are super clean; the slightest hint of grease can ruin beaten egg whites. The whites are perfectly beaten when the tips of the peaks flop over loosely onto themselves. For this mousse, slightly under-whipped whites are better than slightly overwhipped ones.



fold

LIGHTEN THE CHOCOLATE WITH SOME OF THE WHITES TO MAKE FOLDING EASIER. Then fold in the remaining whites, aiming to incorporate them into the chocolate without deflating too much of the foam. Work gently but quickly—as the whites sit, they lose their softness and become lumpy.

Pick one of these three decorating ideas—there's one for

simple

Chopped nuts

You can leave the top of the cake plain, decorate it with chopped nuts, which is easy, or groove the top with a wavy pattern, which is a bit more advanced. The wavy top must be made immediately after assembling the cake. To do it, add enough mousse to the top layer of the cake so it comes to the rim of the springform ring. Smooth the top with a metal spatula or the flat, straight edge of a long knife. Pull an icing comb (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86) or a long serrated knife across the mousse, making a



wave. If the pattern doesn't hold, pop the cake in the fridge for 5- to 10- minute intervals so the mousse starts to set and then try again.

You'll need:
7 ounces (1½ cups)
whole walnuts

Heat the oven to 400°F. Toast the walnuts on a baking sheet in a single layer until golden and aromatic, 12 to 15 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes. Let cool and chop them into medium-fine pieces.

Scoop up a handful of nuts in one hand and pat them onto the side of the cake **1**. Many will fall off but you'll be left with a single layer of nuts. Repeat, rotating the cake to cover all the sides; you'll have extra nuts. If you haven't waved the mousse, sprinkle more chopped nuts on the top. Brush extra nuts off the plate before removing the foil strips.



festive

Shavings and curls



You'll need:
10- to 12-ounce thick block bittersweet,
semisweet, milk, or white chocolate

Set out two large (11x17-inch) sheets of parchment or waxed paper.

Start with shavings: Rub the chocolate with your palm to warm it slightly. Wrap a sheet of paper towel or plastic wrap around half of the chocolate block so it's easier to grip. Drag a vegetable peeler across the side of the chocolate block, letting the shavings fall on the paper. As your hand warms the chocolate, turn the block around. You'll get larger shavings from the warmer side. Stop when you have 1½ to 2 cups.

Then make curls: Curls are made with the same technique as for shavings, only the chocolate must be a bit warmer. Microwave the chocolate block very, very briefly, using 5-second jolts on high, until it feels just slightly warm. One or two 5-second bursts should be sufficient; white chocolate needs even less time. Use the peeler as for shavings, but apply a bit more pressure **1**. If the chocolate still makes shavings or won't give big curls, it isn't warm enough, so heat it again for 5 seconds. If it melts against the peeler, it's too warm, so let it cool. Let the curls fall in an even, single layer on the other sheet of paper until the curls cover the paper.

Using a soup spoon, scoop up some shavings. Starting at the bottom of the cake and using light pressure, gently drag the spoon up the side so the shavings stick; continue until the sides of the cake are covered. Arrange the curls on the top. Brush extra shavings off the plate before removing the foil strips.



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dramatic

Chocolate bands and curls

You'll need:

6 ounces bittersweet chocolate

10- to 12-ounce thick block white, milk, semisweet, or bittersweet chocolate

Finely chop the 6 ounces bittersweet chocolate in a food processor or with a chef's knife. Set a 16x8-inch rectangle of waxed paper on a large cutting board. Get the cake from the fridge.

Melt the chocolate using this quick temper method (for more on tempering, see p. 77): Put half the chopped chocolate in the top of a small double boiler and melt it over simmering water (or in a microwave, using short bursts). When the chocolate is melted, smooth, and warm, take the bowl off the heat. Add the remaining chopped chocolate and stir vigorously with a rubber spatula until melted and smooth. Scrape the chocolate onto the waxed paper and use an offset metal spatula to spread it as evenly as possible to cover the entire rectangle, just passing the edges **1**.

Let the chocolate set until it's pliable but not stiff. It should look more matte than glossy and should bend but not snap if you lift up a corner of the paper; this takes 3 to 20 minutes at room temperature (if it's going slowly, you can pop it in the fridge, but check

the chocolate every minute because once it starts to set, it hardens quickly).

With a sharp paring knife, trim the short edges to neaten them, cutting through the chocolate and the paper. If the chocolate sticks to the knife, it hasn't set enough, so let it cool a few minutes more. Cutting through the chocolate and paper, cut the rectangle lengthwise into two 4-inch-wide bands **2**.

Position one band so the long cut edge touches the plate. Wrap it around the cake, pressing gently **3**. When the band is exactly where you want it, peel away the paper **4**. Don't touch the bare chocolate or it will show fingerprints. Position the other band, cut edge down, on the opposite side so it covers the outside of the cake completely; the bands will overlap slightly. Remove the paper. If the top edges of the bands don't flop onto the cake, nudge them gently (using parchment to avoid prints). If they don't bend easily, don't force them; the cake is pretty with straight edges as well.

Using the block of chocolate, make the curls as described in the "Shavings and curls" section at left. Arrange the curls on top of the cake.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

On the Web...

Watch a video about making chocolate bands at www.finecooking.com; click on "online extras."



In this edition: troubleshooting pie crust shrinkage...tempering chocolate...heating up your oven...greasing and flouring baking pans...making your own pie shield...and the results of our bittersweet chocolate tasting.

Making the most of measuring

LIQUIDS: Always use *liquid measures* (spouted glass and metal cups and beakers graduated with cup measurements and fluid ounces) for liquids, unless you're measuring table- and teaspoons. Put the cup on a level surface and get yourself at eye level with the measure before assessing the amount of liquid in the cup.

FLOUR: Weighing is the best way to measure flour, which is why we give a weight first in our recipes. If you must measure by volume (cups), always stir the flour a little and then spoon it into the cup before leveling with the flat side of a knife. If you scoop the cup directly into the flour, the flour will be compacted into it, and you'll get too much. Extra flour means your dough will

be drier or tougher than it should be. Scooping is also inconsistent. In consecutive tests using the same flour and measuring cup, weights differed by as much as ½ ounce, depending on how much pressure was used when scooping.

If your recipe calls for sifting, be sure to sift at the right time. "One cup flour, sifted" means you should sift *after* measuring; "one cup sifted flour" means you should sift *before*.

When it comes to baking, accurate ingredient measurements can make the difference between terrific baked goods and so-so ones. Here are some of the guidelines we use in our test kitchen for consistent measuring.

—Jennifer Armentrout,
test kitchen manager

SUGAR: Granulated white sugar is relatively dense and heavy, so it doesn't make much difference if you scoop or spoon the sugar into the cup. But treat confectioners' sugar as you would flour. For brown sugar, measure by scooping the cup into the sugar and packing it in.

OTHER DRY GOODS: Always use *dry measures* (measuring cups and spoons that hold the exact amount) for dry ingredients like spices, grains, cornstarch, baking powder, etc. Unless the recipe calls for a "heaping" measure, level it.





How to prevent shrinking pie crusts

While testing the pumpkin pie on p. 42, we found that sometimes the crust shrank during blind baking, and sometimes it didn't. We conducted several rounds of tests, changing variables like the type of pan, oven temperature, and chilling time. We discovered that the crust was less apt to shrink in metal and unglazed ceramic pie pans. It shrank most dramatically in Pyrex pans, slipping off the rim and down the sides of the smooth glass.

Chilling time didn't seem to make a big difference, but oven temperature did. Higher baking temperatures (425°F) encouraged shrinkage, while lower heat (350°F) minimized it. Shirley O. Corriher, our food scientist, explains: "At higher temperatures, the gluten proteins in the flour tighten up. If they're heated more gently, they shrink less." Other factors that can cause shrinkage are over-handling the dough and not chilling the dough sufficiently before baking.

To avoid shrinking crusts, use a metal or unglazed ceramic pie plate (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86) and blind bake the dough at 350°F. If you only have glass pie plates, you can still blind bake the crust. Just be sure to trim the dough a tad beyond the rim of the pie pan, perhaps 1/8 inch. This slight overhang will help compensate for the shrinkage and slippage. (But don't go overboard: Too much overhang can cause the crust to crack during baking.)

—Sarah Jay, managing editor

Your oven might be lying to you

Almost every recipe that uses an oven instructs you to heat the oven ahead of time. But how long does it take to heat? We've always allowed at least 20 to 30 minutes for an oven to get good and hot. So we were a bit surprised when our new electronically controlled ovens were beeping to indicate they were done heating in as little as 10 minutes. Could that be true? The answer is "not quite," and here's why:

When you turn on an oven, say to 350°F, the oven doesn't just shoot up to 350° and stay there. It's impossible, because oven heating elements are either on or off, and they can't really maintain a constant temperature. Instead, oven thermostats are designed to strive for an average temperature (the one you set).

When the oven is first turned on and starts aiming for the target temperature, it actually exceeds that temperature by as much as 50° to 75°F before the heating element shuts off. The temperature then drops well below the target before the heat kicks in again. In subsequent heating cycles, the range around the target temperature becomes smaller, about 25°F on either side.

Our ovens claim to be heated after the first temperature cycle, but we always ignore the beep and let them go for at least 20 minutes (or about three cycles), before we bake. The extra time means that all parts of the oven, not just the area around the sensor, are fully heated, and that the temperature swings within the oven cavity aren't as drastic. —J. A.

technique

Preparing a baking pan

If you've ever experienced the heartbreak of a cake sticking to its baking pan, chances are you didn't prepare the pan well enough. For cakes that slide flawlessly out of their pans every time, follow these steps. —J. A.



1 Grease the pan liberally with a visible coating of vegetable shortening, soft butter, or vegetable oil spray. Too little grease is the most common cause of sticking cakes.



2 If your recipe calls for flouring the pan, spoon a generous amount of flour into the pan and tilt it so the flour slides over all the inside surfaces of the pan. Dump out any extra and then give the pan a few hard knocks over a trash can to get rid of any excess.

Tip: If your recipe tells you to line the pan with parchment, be sure it lies flat and fits inside the edges of the pan. Wrinkled parchment can cause problems. In most cases, it's a good idea to grease the pan before fitting the parchment.

Make your own pie shield

Sometimes during baking, the edges of a pie crust start to brown too quickly. If that happens, you need a shield. Some kitchen shops sell metal pie shields, but you can easily make your own from foil.

Just follow the photos at right.

—Jessica Bard, contributor

The trouble with flour

If we haven't yet convinced you that weight is the best way to measure flour, here's one more argument. While testing the recipes for our cookie foldout in this issue, we noticed that equal volumes of different brands of flour don't weigh the same. For example, 1 cup of Gold Medal unbleached all-purpose flour consistently weighed about ½ ounce less than 1 cup of King Arthur unbleached all-purpose flour. To make up the difference, we needed about 2 tablespoons more Gold Medal flour.

To make matters worse, the flour weights varied depending on which measuring cup we used. One particular manufacturer's cup gave us a 4-ounce cup of Gold Medal flour, while another manufacturer's cup of the same flour weighed in at 4½ ounces. These discrepancies are enough to frustrate even the most patient of cooks, and that's why we always use a scale (see our review of electronic scales on p. 14). —J. A.



1 cup = 5 ounces

1 cup = 4½ ounces

1 Fold a 12-inch square of foil in half, and then in half again to make a 6-inch square.



2 Trim the edges to make a quarter circle.



3 Measure 2 inches in and cut out the core of the circle.



4 Open the foil and spread out the ring. Fold ¼ inch of the outside edge down to fit over the edge of the pie crust.



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Bittersweet chocolate

Some chocolates are better for baking than others. But who's going to buy seven different chocolates and bake batch upon batch of chocolate chocolate-chip cookies to find out which ones are the best? The Baker's Dozen will, and for us, they did. Six members of the group, all professional bakers, met to hold a blind tasting of some of the most widely available bittersweet chocolates in the country. They tasted them plain, in a ganache (a rich chocolate filling or icing made of chocolate and heavy cream; see the recipe below), and in a chocolate cookie recipe.

The tasting yielded good news for home bakers—there's absolutely no need to spend \$16 on a pound of chocolate to make a pan of brownies. Save the good stuff for nibbling. In most baking recipes, the nuances of high-end chocolates tend to get lost in the mix—literally. Our tasters found that the best chocolates for baking are the mid-range products that are becoming increasingly available, even in supermarkets. They deliver great chocolate punch without knocking you over with their price. For more information, see the tasting results at right (prices are approximate).

—Maryellen Driscoll, editor at large,
with Carolyn Weil, contributor to
The Baker's Dozen Cookbook

top pick



**LINDT EXCELLENCE
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70% cocoa
\$9 per pound

The consistent favorite in all the tests. Tasters loved the pure chocolatey flavor, describing it as "well balanced, fruity with a hint of cherry, and compelling." It melted into a silky-smooth ganache with an attractive gloss, and made a soft but pleasantly chewy cookie. Available in the baking or candy sections of specialty food stores and supermarkets, and at www.chocosphere.com.

The Baker's Dozen consists of more than 300 baking professionals and enthusiasts who gather quarterly in the San Francisco Bay area to share baking tips, techniques, recipes, and solutions to common baking challenges. Members at our tasting included Flo Braker, Linda Carrucci, Charity Ferreira, Fran Gage, Emily Luchetti, and Carolyn Weil.

The Baker's Dozen test recipe

Bittersweet Chocolate Ganache

Yields about 2/3 cup.

All the ganaches tasted by The Baker's Dozen were made according to this recipe. Use chocolate ganache to glaze cakes, or make your own quick chocolate truffles by letting the ganache cool and then scooping it into balls and rolling them in cocoa. You can also thin the ganache with 1 to 2 tablespoons water to make a rich chocolate sauce.

1/3 cup heavy cream
4 ounces bittersweet chocolate,
finely chopped

Heat the cream almost to a boil. Put the chopped chocolate in a medium bowl, pour the hot cream over it, and whisk gently until the chocolate is completely melted and the ganache is smooth.

Why bake with bittersweet?

In many of our recipes, we call for bittersweet chocolate when we're looking for deep, intense chocolate flavor. That's because, in general, bittersweet chocolates contain less sugar and a higher percentage of cocoa (also called chocolate liquor or cacao) than semisweet chocolate. There are no federal standards, however, defining the difference between the two, so the percentage of cocoa in one manufacturer's semisweet chocolate might be higher than that in another's bittersweet. (For example, Scharffen Berger's semisweet chocolate contains 62% cocoa, about the same amount in what many other brands define as their bittersweet chocolate.) If that seems confusing, the good news is that bittersweet and semisweet chocolates are interchangeable in recipes. Just don't confuse either of the two with unsweetened chocolate. Then you'll really taste a difference.

—M. D.





2 VALRHONA LE NOIR GASTRONOMIE DARK CHOCOLATE

61% cocoa
\$14.50 per pound

The runner-up, this chocolate is sweeter than many of the others, with just a hint of fruitiness. It made an excellent ganache, notable for being particularly creamy. The cookie was “chewy-chewy” and not quite as chocolatey as tasters would have liked. Sold in specialty food stores, some supermarkets, and at www.chocosphere.com.



3 GUITTARD BITTERSWEET ONYX WAFERS

72% cocoa
\$6 per pound

While it wasn't the most compelling chocolate to taste plain, this one earned respect in both the ganache and the cookie, delivering a dependable, solid chocolate flavor. The cookie was liked for having a soft texture with just the right amount of chew. Sold at www.kingarthurfleur.com.



4 GHIRARDELLI BITTERSWEET CHOCOLATE

at least 50% cocoa
\$10.50 per pound

This proved to be a decent, readily available option for those who can't track down one of the top three chocolates. Its flavor was pleasant if not especially remarkable, with a subtle, smoky aftertaste. The ganache was distinctively smooth and creamy, with an almost buttery consistency. The cookie was also quite good. Available in supermarkets and at www.ghirardelli.com.



5 CALLEBAUT PREMIUM BITTER SWEET CHOCOLATE

55% cocoa
\$6.50 per pound

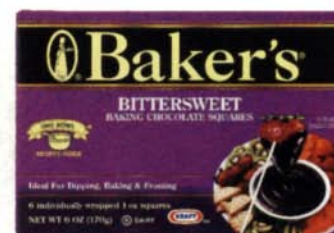
This one had a deep chocolate flavor but was slightly short on complexity. What really set it apart was its ganache—extremely creamy and smooth with an attractive gloss. Its chocolatey flavor got lost in the cookie, which also had an unpopular sticky-chewy texture. Available in some supermarkets and at www.chocosphere.com.



6 SCHARFFEN BERGER BITTERSWEET CHOCOLATE

70% cocoa
\$15 per pound

For those tasters who like their chocolate less sweet and more tannic, this was a hit when tasted plain. In the cookie, it lost its distinctive flavor but was liked for its fudgy texture. But the ganache broke twice during the tasting (a ganache made later in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen did not break). Sold in specialty food stores and at www.scharffenberger.com.



7 BAKER'S BITTERSWEET BAKING CHOCOLATE SQUARES

at least 35% cocoa
\$6 per pound

This was the only chocolate in the tasting that was truly awful—overly sweet, one-dimensional, and tainted by an unappealing burnt taste. Its greatest downfall was a chalky and gritty texture that couldn't be masked in either the cookie or the ganache. Sold in supermarkets and at www.netgrocer.com.

Tempering chocolate

In order for decorations made of melted chocolate to set up hard and shiny, the chocolate used to make them must be “tempered,” meaning that it's within a specific temperature range when it's poured or shaped. Chocolate that's out of temper when shaped has a streaky gray appearance, sometimes referred to as “bloom.” The method on p. 71 used to make the bands for the Chocolate Mousse Cake is a quick and generally reliable way of tempering chocolate, but you may want to use a thermometer to double-check that the chocolate is at the proper temperature before pouring it. As long as you don't scorch the chocolate, you can reheat and cool it as many times as necessary to get it in temper. —J. A.

Temperatures for tempered chocolate

Bitter- and semisweet chocolate: 88° to 91°F

Milk and white chocolate: 84° to 87°F

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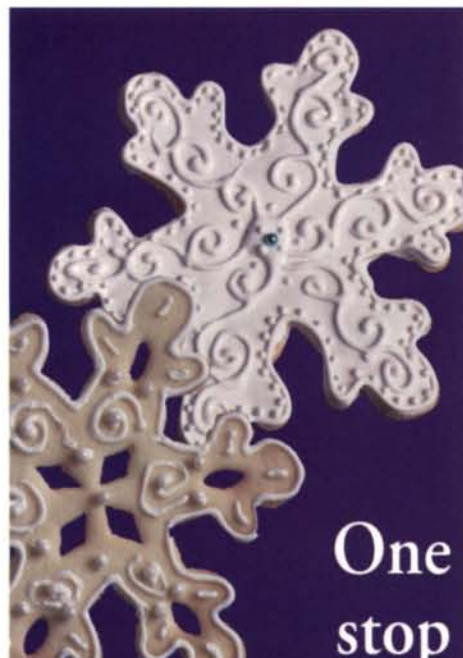
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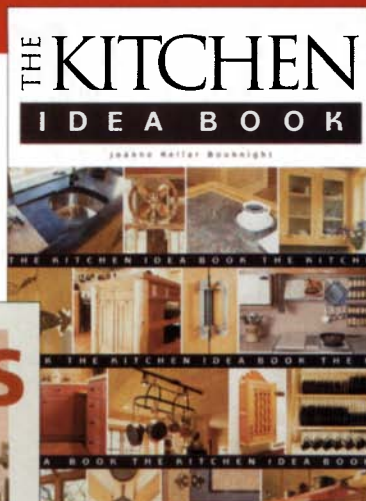
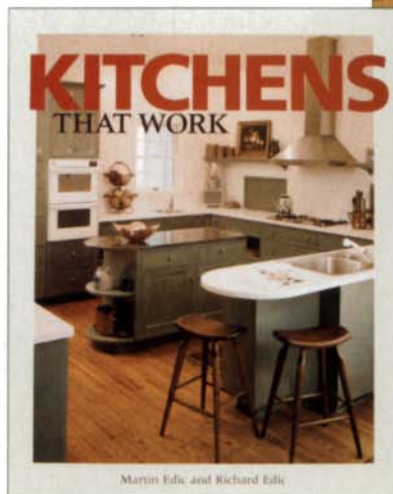
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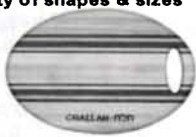
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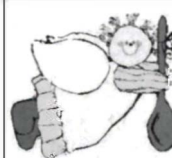


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Holiday Cookies *p. 186*

Contact **Amazon.com** for food coloring paste for decorating cookies. A 12-color set of Ateco pastes is \$20.99. **Sur La Table** (800-243-0852; www.surlatable.com) carries 1¼-inch stainless-steel, spring-loaded ball scoopers for making cookies starting at \$12.95. Also try Sur La Table for plastic-coated canvas pastry bags for piping meringues or royal icing (the bags start at \$12.95) as well as for sets of decorating tips. **Deb El Just Whites** powdered egg whites are perfect for making royal icing and are sold at most supermarkets and at www.shopping.yahoo.com; an 8-ounce container is \$6.75.



Coffee Cakes *p. 44*

For a high-quality Nordicware bundt pan to make the Banana Chocolate Swirl Cake, try **Kitchen Krafts** (800-776-0575; www.kitchenkrafts.com), which sells a 10-cup pan for \$29.95.

Holiday Pies *p. 38*

Try the Sweet Celebrations catalog (800-328-6722) for leaf cutters to decorate your holiday pie. A set of seven 2- to 2½-inch cutters is \$8.95. For more information about unglazed ceramic pie plates, contact The Pampered Chef (800-266-5562; www.pamperedchef.com).



Biscotti *p. 58*

You can buy **Scharffen Berger** (800-930-4528; www.scharffenberger.com) chocolate, nibs, and cocoa at most specialty food shops, or contact the company directly to mail order it (\$30 minimum) or to find a store in your area. For good-quality nuts, raisins, dried apricots, and candied ginger, go to **Sultan's**

Delight (800-852-5046; www.sultansdelight.com) or **Adriana's Caravan** (800-316-0820; www.adrianascaravan.com). You can order candied orange peel for making the Chocolate-Orange Biscotti from **The Baker's Catalogue** (800-827-6836; www.kingarthurflour.com). A 3-ounce container is \$3.95.

Chocolate Mousse Cake *p. 66*

Use an icing comb to give your cake's frosting a jazzy pattern. **Pastryitems.com** (410-638-9761) carries this triangular-shaped tool for \$2.40.



Cookie Baking Equipment *p. 62*

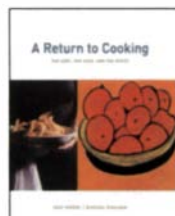
Look up **The Baker's Catalogue** (800-827-6836; www.kingarthurflour.com) for sheets of pre-cut parchment. The sheets perfectly fit a half sheet pan; 41 square feet of paper costs \$14.95. The Baker's Catalogue also carries Zeroll teaspoon and tablespoon cookie scoops for \$19.95 each, as well as sprinkles and sugar crystals. **Cooking.com** (800-663-8810) sells a range of offset Ateco spatulas starting at \$1.95, as well as cookie cutters and Cuisipro measuring spoons (\$9.95). Try **Williams-Sonoma** (877-812-6235; www.williams-sonoma.com) for stainless-steel bench scrapers, which start at \$8, as well as Silpat non-stick baking liners, ranging from \$23 to \$46. **Chef's Catalog** (800-338-3232; www.chefscatalog.com) carries Dough-makers baking sheets starting at \$17.99. **Kitchen Emporium** (888-858-7920; www.kitchenemporium.com) sells Chicago Metallic cookie sheets starting at \$12.95. Contact **KitchenAid** (800-541-6390; www.kitchenaid.com) for more information about its stand mixers.

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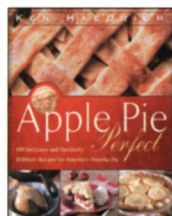
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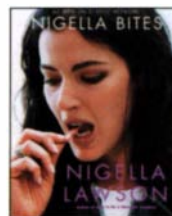
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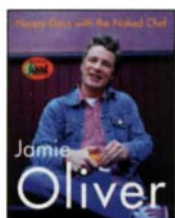
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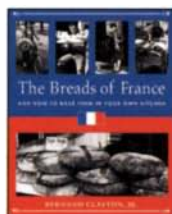
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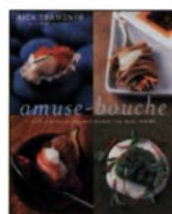
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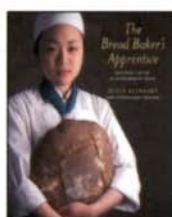
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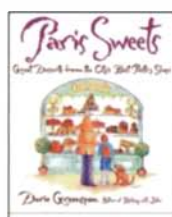
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what's **inside**





BY ELAINE KHOSROVA

^{fine}
Cooking

Holiday Cookies

Whether you crave a crackly, ginger molasses cookie or the crisp snap of a buttery sugar cookie, you've come to the right place. Here you'll find 15 delicious holiday cookies—from classics like linzers and gingerbread, to sophisticated orange poppy-seed cookies, and crowd-pleasers like chocolate fudge cookies and raspberry crumb bars. There's something for every holiday baker to make for family and friends—plus dozens of mixing, baking, and decorating tips to make cookie baking a breeze.

Cookie tips

mixing

USE FRESH UNSALTED BUTTER FOR BEST RESULTS.

Let it stand at room temperature until it's malleable, but not too soft: 30 to 60 minutes depending on the temperature of the room. It should give slightly when pressed but still maintain its shape. The ideal is 67°F—the temperature at which butter will best hold air and be stable. Butter that's too soft will make a sticky dough that's harder to work with, provides less leavening, and spreads too much during baking. To speed up the softening time, cut butter into tablespoon-size pieces.

USE ROOM-TEMPERATURE EGGS. For best results, make sure your eggs are at room temperature before adding them to a creamed mixture. To warm eggs quickly, submerge them (still in the shell) in a bowl of warm tap water for 5 to 10 minutes.

USE UNSIFTED ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR. If possible, use a scale to weigh flour for consistent results. If using dry measures, lightly spoon the flour or other dry ingredient into the cup and level it with a straight edge. Don't tap the cup or pack more into it. Note: These cookie recipes were tested with Gold Medal unbleached all-purpose flour, and the measurements in the recipes reflect the weight of that flour. If you choose to use a flour that's slightly heavier (such as King Arthur unbleached all-purpose flour), you may want to use 2 tablespoons less flour per cup.

LOOK FOR A SMOOTH MIXTURE WHEN CREAMING BUTTER AND SUGAR. If the mixture is very granular, it means that either the butter is too cold or more mixing is needed. Scrape down the sides of the bowl at least once during mixing to ensure that all the butter and sugar are evenly incorporated.

baking

MAKE SURE YOUR OVEN IS CALIBRATED

and, for best results, heat it for at least 20 minutes before baking (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 72, for more on this).

USE SHINY, HEAVY-GAUGE OR INSULATED COOKIE SHEETS with no sides or very low ones. They let air circulate evenly and protect cookie bottoms from browning too much. Avoid dark, thin cookie sheets, which can warp easily and cause the cookies' edges to burn.

LINE COOKIE SHEETS WITH PARCHMENT.

It saves on cleaning time, prevents sticking, and allows you to whisk one batch of cookies off the sheet all at once and replace it with a raw batch instantly. (Never put raw cookie dough directly onto a hot baking sheet; it will spread prematurely.) Don't use waxed paper: Its paraffin coating begins to smoke at 350°F.

SET COOKIES FAR ENOUGH APART TO

ALLOW FOR SPREADING. Arrange them in even rows or staggered rows for more even air circulation. Be sure cookies in a single batch are all the same size and thickness so they bake evenly.

BAKE ONE SHEET AT A TIME

in the center of the oven. This is an especially good idea when baking times are 10 minutes or less. If necessary, two sheets can be baked together if the sheets are rotated front to back and top to bottom halfway through baking. In a convection oven, you can bake several sheets at a time.

CHECK FOR DONENESS AT THE MINIMUM BAKING TIME GIVEN.

Doneness is best judged by golden color unless the dough is dark, in which case firm or matte tops (rather than shiny, wet-looking ones) will indicate doneness.

storing

- ❖ Cookie doughs can be wrapped and refrigerated for about four days or frozen for several weeks; thaw them overnight in the refrigerator. If the dough cracks when rolled or shaped, it's too cold. Divide the dough in half and let it sit at room temperature, checking every 15 minutes to see if it's malleable.
- ❖ To best preserve bar cookies when freezing them, bake and cool the dough without cutting it. Wrap (while still in the pan) and freeze whole.
- ❖ Let cookies cool completely before storing. A tin or a plastic container with a tight-fitting lid is best for cookies stored at room temperature. If layering or stacking cookies, put sheets of waxed paper or parchment in between to prevent sticking.
- ❖ If storing cookies in a cookie jar, line it with a resealable plastic bag for airtight storage.
- ❖ To freeze cookies, use heavy-duty freezer bags, expelling as much air as possible, or air-tight containers, filling any air space at the top with crumpled plastic wrap. Separate layers with waxed paper or parchment.
- ❖ Avoid storing soft cookies with crisp ones, or they will soften the crisp batch.
- ❖ Crisp cookies may soften when thawed after freezing; to recrisp, put them in a 300°F oven for 8 to 10 minutes.

mailing

TO PACK AND MAIL COOKIES, select sturdy ones like bar and drop cookies and pack them individually or in small bunches in plastic wrap. Put in tins, with heavier cookies on the bottom, and separate crisp cookies from soft ones. Surround the tins with bubble wrap or styrofoam peanuts, and pack the tins in heavy-duty boxes.

Slice & bake



Orange Poppy-Seed Cookies

Yields about thirty-six 2½-inch cookies.

5¾ ounces (1 ¼ cups) all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon poppy seeds
¼ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 tablespoon orange juice
1 tablespoon packed finely grated orange zest (from about 1½ large oranges)
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

Several hours or the day before baking: In a small bowl, combine the flour, poppy seeds, baking powder, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the egg, orange juice, orange zest, and lemon zest; beat until blended, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Add the flour mixture, beating on low just until combined. Scrape the soft dough onto a large piece of plastic wrap (about 13 inches long), wrap and freeze for 30 minutes.

Unwrap the dough and knead it briefly on a floured surface to remove any air pockets. Wrap the dough in plastic again; roll and gently pull opposite ends of the wrapped dough to create a 9-inch-long log. Freeze the log for 1 hour or refrigerate for several hours until very firm. (The dough can also be kept frozen, well wrapped, for several weeks.)

To bake: Heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets or cover them with parchment (the cookies will spread a bit more and be slightly crisper on greased sheets). Unwrap the log and roll it briefly on a lightly floured surface to remove the wrinkles on the dough's surface and to make the log more evenly round. Slice the log crosswise into ⅜-inch-thick rounds. Set the rounds 1 inch apart on the cookie sheets. Bake until the edges are lightly browned, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes on the sheets; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.



Marbled Chocolate-Vanilla Cookies

Yields about thirty-six 2½-inch cookies.

6¾ ounces (1 ½ cups) all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
2 ounces semisweet chocolate (preferably high quality), melted and cooled slightly

Several hours or the day before baking: In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg and vanilla, scrape down the sides of the bowl, and beat again until blended. Add the flour mixture, beating just until combined. Remove half the dough (about 9 ounces); set aside. Whisk the cocoa into the melted chocolate; add to the dough remaining in the mixing bowl and beat briefly to blend.

Divide the chocolate and vanilla doughs into 8 pieces each, more or less the same size. Recombine the pieces, alternately pressing the chocolate and vanilla pieces together, to create a marbled ball. On a lightly floured surface, roll and shape the ball into a 9-inch-long log. (Handle the dough as little as possible to keep the marbled pattern more distinct.) Wrap in plastic and chill until very firm, 2 to 3 hours.

To bake: Heat the oven to 350°F. Cover your cookie sheets with parchment. Unwrap the firm dough and roll the log briefly on the counter to make it more evenly round. Cut it crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices; arrange the slices 1½ inches apart on the sheets. Bake until the edges are lightly browned, 9 to 11 minutes, rotating the sheets from the top to bottom racks after 5 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

technique tips

- ❖ Always refrigerate or freeze the dough until very firm to make it easier to slice evenly.
- ❖ Before cutting, use a ruler to measure the width of the first cookie, and use that as a sample for the rest.
- ❖ If slicing the log creates unevenly shaped disks, simply reshape them quickly with your hands.

Maple-Walnut Butter Cookies

Yields about thirty 2-inch square cookies.

4¾ ounces (1 cup plus 1 tablespoon) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
½ cup finely granulated maple sugar (see note)
2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
1 large egg
3 ounces (about ⅔ cup) coarsely chopped walnuts

Several hours or the day before baking: In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and both sugars until creamy and well



blended, about 5 minutes. Beat in the egg, scrape down the sides of the bowl, and beat again until blended. Add the flour mixture, beating just until combined, and then mix in the nuts.

Transfer the soft dough to the center of a 12-inch-long piece of plastic wrap. Cover with the wrap and shape the dough into an 8-inch-long squared-off log. (Since the dough is soft, it may be hard to square off the sides completely; after chilling, the dough is easier to model.) Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or overnight. (The dough can also be

kept, well wrapped, in the freezer for several weeks.)

To bake: Heat the oven to 350°F. Cover your cookie sheets with parchment. Cut the firm dough crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices. Arrange the slices about an inch apart on the sheets. Bake the cookies, one sheet at a time, on a middle rack until the edges just begin to brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool on the cookie sheet for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Note: Be sure to use a finely granulated maple sugar for this cookie. Vermont Gold (www.vermontgoldusa.com; 888-556-2753) makes one that's available in health-food stores or by mail.

Drop cookies

Chewy Cranberry-Oatmeal Cookies

Yields about forty-four 3-inch cookies.

6¾ ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2½ cups old-fashioned oats
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, slightly softened
1 cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 tablespoon honey
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
6 ounces (1⅓ cups) dried cranberries
5 ounces (about 1 cup) chopped walnuts

Heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets or cover them with parchment. In a medium bowl, mix the flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon; stir in the oats.



With an electric mixer, beat the butter and both sugars until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, and then scrape down the sides of the bowl; add the honey and vanilla and beat until blended. Add the flour mixture in two additions, beating until well combined. Stir in the cranberries and walnuts.

Drop the dough by the heaping tablespoonful about 2 inches apart onto the cookie sheets. Bake until the centers of the cookies are soft and no longer look wet, 9 to 11 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Treasure Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 2½-inch cookies.

8½ ounces (1¾ cups) all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, slightly softened
¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 large eggs
9-ounce package condensed mincemeat, crumbled

Heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets or cover them with parchment. In a medium bowl, mix the flour, baking soda, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Add the flour mixture and beat until just combined. Add the crumbled mincemeat and beat until the dough is well mixed and has darkened slightly.

Drop the dough by the heaping tablespoonful about 2 inches apart onto the sheets. Bake until the cookies are very lightly browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.



Chocolate Fudge Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 2¾-inch cookies.

8½ ounces (1¾ cups) all-purpose flour
⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, slightly softened
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
9 ounces (1½ cups) semisweet chocolate chunks
3½ ounces (about ¾ cup) coarsely chopped pecans

Heat the oven to 350°F. Cover your cookie sheets with parchment. In a medium bowl, mix the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and both sugars on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, and then the vanilla, scraping down the sides of the bowl. Add the flour mixture and mix on medium low just until combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and stir in the chocolate and pecans.

Drop the dough by the heaping tablespoonful about 2 inches apart onto the cookie sheets. Bake until they're still very soft but no longer look wet, about 8 minutes. (These cookies are especially good and chewy if underbaked at this short time; otherwise the cookie is overly crisp and hard when cooled.) Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.



technique tips

- ❖ Before mixing, your butter should be malleable but not very soft. If it's too soft, it will spread too much during baking, and the cookies may become too thin and delicate to handle. Generally, 30 to 60 minutes at room temperature is enough time to slightly soften the butter.
- ❖ To make chewy drop cookies, underbake them slightly so that they're still quite soft and not yet browned, but no longer look wet in the center. For crisper cookies, bake them longer, letting the cookies become lightly browned all over.
- ❖ Use a spring-loaded 1¼-inch ice-cream scoop for ease and consistency when dropping dough onto the baking sheets. (For sources, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86.)

Shaped cookies



Lime Nut Buttons

Yields about thirty 1½-inch cookies.

4½ ounces (1 cup) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon table salt
½ cup confectioners' sugar; more for coating
⅓ cup coarsely chopped pecans
¼ cup sweetened flaked coconut
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons finely grated lime zest
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Several hours before baking:

In a small bowl, combine the flour and salt. In a food processor, combine the ½ cup confectioners' sugar, the pecans, and the coconut. Process until the pecans are finely ground. With an electric mixer, beat the butter until creamy. Add the pecan mixture and beat until well blended. Beat in the lime zest and vanilla. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and add the flour mixture, beating just until combined. Remove the dough from the bowl, wrap in plastic, and chill until firm, about 3 hours.

To bake:

Heat the oven to 350°F. Measure the dough into heaping teaspoon-size pieces and roll each piece between your palms to form a ball. Put the balls 1½ inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets; bake until the edges of the cookies barely begin to brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 3 to 4 minutes and then roll in confectioners' sugar while still very warm. Repeat rolling to create a delicate powdery coating.

technique tips

- ❖ Chill the dough until firm before shaping.
- ❖ When shaping, work with half the dough at a time, keeping the remainder chilled.
- ❖ If the dough sticks to your hands when shaping it into balls, try wetting your hands occasionally with cold water.
- ❖ Shape the cookies identically so that they bake within the same time.



Molasses Crinkles

Yields about thirty-six 3-inch cookies.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
1¼ teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground cloves
½ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
⅓ cup molasses
1 large egg
Granulated sugar for rolling

Black & White Crescents

Yields about forty-two 3-inch cookies.

7 ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon table salt
⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 ounces white chocolate



Several hours before baking: In a medium bowl, combine the flour and salt. Sift in the cocoa and baking soda; stir well to mix. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg and vanilla, scraping down the sides of the bowl, until smooth and blended. Add the flour mixture, beating until well combined. Wrap the dough in plastic and chill for at least 2 hours.

To bake: Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment. Scoop the dough into pieces about the size of a heaping teaspoon. Roll each piece between your palms to form balls. Roll each ball into a 3-inch-long cylinder, tapering the ends slightly. Put the cylinders about ¾ inch apart on a cookie sheet and curve the ends to make crescent shapes. When one sheet is filled, bake for 8 minutes while filling the other sheet. Bake the second batch for 8 minutes. (They'll be puffed, covered with tiny cracks, and dry on top after 8 minutes.) Let cool on the sheets.

When the cookies are completely cooled, melt the white chocolate in the microwave or in the top of a double boiler over barely simmering water. Put the melted chocolate into a small plastic bag. Snip a tiny hole in one bottom corner of the bag. Pipe the chocolate across the cookies to make thin zigzag stripes. Let the stripes harden at room temperature or in the refrigerator before storing the cookies.

Several hours before baking:

In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and brown sugar until light in color and texture. Beat in the oil until blended. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, add the molasses and the egg, and beat until blended. Stir in the flour mixture until well combined. Wrap the dough in plastic and chill until firm, about 3 hours.

To bake:

Heat the oven to 375°F. Measure the dough into tablespoon-size pieces and roll each piece between your palms to form 1-inch balls. Roll the balls in granulated sugar to coat. Put the balls 2 inches apart on lightly greased cookie sheets. Sprinkle the tops with more sugar and bake until the center surface of the cookies is barely dry, 9 to 10 minutes (don't over-bake). Let cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Bar cookies



Raspberry Crumb Bars

Yields eighteen 3x2-inch bars.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
1 ¼ cups old-fashioned oats
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) chilled unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
4 ounces (about 1 cup) sliced almonds
15 ¼-ounce jar seedless raspberry fruit spread

Heat the oven to 325°F. With an electric mixer, combine the flour, oats, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Mix on low speed until well combined. Add the butter and mix on medium until the butter is mostly blended and the mixture appears moist and begins to pull together, about 3 minutes. Stir in the almonds. Reserve 1 ½ cups of this

crumb mixture and refrigerate. Firmly press the remaining mixture into the bottom of an ungreased 13x9-inch baking pan. Bake in the middle of the oven until the almonds are just beginning to brown, about 25 minutes. Let cool for about 20 minutes. Spread the fruit spread evenly on top, leaving an ⅛-inch border around the edge of the crust. Crumble the reserved crumb mixture over the top, letting the fruit show through in places. Continue baking until lightly browned and the fruit filling is bubbling all over, including the center of the pan, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool completely before slicing into 18 bars (or into smaller pieces, if you like).



Upside-Down Peanut-Butter Fig Bars

Yields eighteen 3x2-inch bars.

9 ounces (about 1 ½ cups) dried Mission figs
5 ¾ ounces (1 ¼ cups) all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
⅔ cup super chunky peanut butter
⅔ cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
1 large egg
⅓ cup tepid water
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup granola (without fruit)

Heat the oven to 325°F. Snip off the stem of each fig and cut each into quarters, lengthwise; put the figs in a medium bowl, cover with hot water, and soak for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, butter the bottom of a 13x9-inch baking pan and line with waxed paper. Butter the paper and the sides of the pan. In a small bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. With an electric mixer, beat the peanut butter, brown sugar, ½ cup of the granulated sugar, and the butter until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg and water; scrape down the sides of the bowl. Beat until the mixture looks creamy. Beat in the flour mixture just until combined.

Drain the figs well and toss them with the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and the cinnamon. Arrange the figs, cut side down, in one layer in the lined pan. Sprinkle the granola on top, filling the spaces between the figs.

Drop spoonfuls of the dough on top of the figs and then spread it evenly in the pan. Bake in the middle of the oven until the edges are very lightly browned, 35 to 40 minutes. The edges will be slightly puffed; press them down with a spatula to flatten. Let cool until the pan is warm to the touch. Invert the pan onto a cutting board, remove the pan and peel off the paper. (If any figs pull away, simply replace them.) Let cool completely before slicing into 18 bars (or into smaller pieces, if you like).

technique tips

- ❖ For soft doughs, use a small offset spatula to spread the mixture evenly so that the finished bars are uniform.
- ❖ For a thoroughly crisp bar, partially bake the bottom layer before adding the filling and top crumb layer.
- ❖ Let the bars cool completely before cutting.



Apricot, Pistachio & Chocolate-Chip Bars

Yields eighteen 3x2-inch bars.

9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour
1 ¼ cups old-fashioned oats
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) chilled unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
4 ounces (about 1 cup) chopped, shelled natural pistachios
½ cup diced dried apricots
½ cup white chocolate or semisweet chocolate morsels
15 ¼-ounce jar apricot preserves

Heat the oven to 325°F. With an electric mixer, combine the flour, oats, sugar, cinnamon, and salt; mix on low speed until well combined. Add the butter and mix on medium until the butter is mostly blended and the mixture appears moist and begins to pull together, about 3 minutes. Stir in the pistachios. Reserve 1 ½ cups of this crumb mixture, stir the dried apricots and chocolate morsels into it, and refrigerate. Firmly press the remaining mixture into the bottom of an ungreased

13x9-inch baking pan. Bake in the middle of the oven for 25 minutes. Let cool for about 20 minutes. Spread the apricot preserves evenly on top, leaving a ⅛-inch border around the edge of the crust. Crumble the reserved crumb mixture over the top. Continue baking until lightly browned and the fruit filling is bubbling all over, including the center of the pan, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool completely before slicing into 18 bars (or into smaller pieces, if you like).

Roll & cut

Raspberry Linzer Cookies

Yields about thirty-two 2½-inch sandwich cookies.

2½ ounces (½ cup) sliced almonds
2½ ounces (½ cup) coarsely chopped hazelnuts
9½ ounces (2 cups plus 1 tablespoon) all-purpose flour
¾ cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons lemon zest
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
7 ounces (14 tablespoons) chilled unsalted butter
1 large egg
1 tablespoon cold water
½ cup raspberry preserves
Confectioners' sugar

Several hours before baking: In a food processor, process the almonds and hazelnuts with ½ cup of the flour until fine textured but not powdered. (To avoid overprocessing, stop the machine occasionally and feel the nuts; they may look



like they're still chunky, but they may actually just be clumping together.) Add the remaining flour, granulated sugar, lemon zest, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and cloves. Pulse to combine. Cut the butter into ½-inch cubes and add to the flour mixture; pulse until the mixture looks like coarse meal. Don't overprocess. Transfer to a large bowl. Whisk together the egg and water; sprinkle over the flour mixture and toss gently to combine. The dough should hold together when pinched. (If it seems dry, sprinkle on a bit more water.) Gather the dough into two balls and knead briefly just to blend. Wrap in plastic and chill until firm, 2 to 3 hours.

To bake: Heat the oven to 325°F. Cover your cookie

sheets with parchment.

Generously flour a work surface. Roll one ball of the dough ⅜ inch thick. (Keep the rest in the refrigerator, and if the dough warms up to the point of being sticky while you're working with it, return it to the refrigerator.) Cut out as many 2½-inch rounds as possible, rerolling the scraps to make more rounds. Arrange on the cookie sheets about ¾ inch apart. Cut 1 ¼-inch holes in the center of half the rounds. Reroll these center scraps to make more cookies. Bake until the edges are lightly browned, about 15 minutes. Let cool on the sheets. Repeat with the remaining dough.

To assemble, spread a heaping ½ teaspoon preserves on the underside of the whole cookie rounds. Top with the doughnut-shaped cookies, bottom sides against the preserves. Just before serving, sift confectioners' sugar lightly over the cookies.

Gingerbread Cookies

Yields thirty 4-inch cookies or forty 3-inch cookies.

10½ ounces (2½ cups) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground cloves
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened
½ cup packed dark brown sugar
½ cup molasses
1 tablespoon grated or finely minced fresh ginger
1 large egg

Several hours before baking: In a medium bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy, scraping down the sides of the bowl from time to time with a



rubber spatula. Beat in the molasses, fresh ginger, and egg, again scraping down the sides of the bowl to blend the mixture. Beat in the flour mixture just until combined. Remove the dough from the bowl, divide it in half (it will be somewhat sticky), wrap in plastic, and chill until firm, at least 3 hours.

To bake: Heat the oven to 325°F. Cover your cookie sheets with parchment. Generously flour a work surface. Remove the dough from the refrigerator. It may be stiff and hard to roll at first; let it sit for a few minutes. Roll the dough ⅜ inch thick. Cut out the shapes you want and transfer them to the cookie sheets, arranging them about 1 inch apart. Reroll the scraps to make more cookies. Bake until the undersides are browned, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool before transferring or decorating.



Butter Cookies

Yields thirty 3-inch shaped cookies.

9½ ounces (2 cups plus 1 tablespoon) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Several hours before baking:

Combine the flour and salt in a medium bowl. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg and vanilla. Beat in the flour mixture just until combined. Remove the dough from the bowl, gather it into two disks, wrap each in plastic, and chill until firm, 2 to 3 hours.

To bake:

Heat the oven to 325°F. Cover your cookie sheets with parchment. Flour a work surface and have a little extra flour on hand for the rolling pin. Roll one dough disk ⅜ inch thick. Cut out the shapes you want (decorate with sprinkles before baking, if using) and transfer to the sheets, arranging them about ¾ inch apart. Reroll the scraps to make more cookies. Bake until the edges turn golden, 13 to 16 minutes, depending on size. Let cool before transferring or decorating with icing. Repeat with the second disk of dough.

technique tips

- ❖ Always chill the dough until firm.
- ❖ Work with part of the dough at a time, keeping the rest chilled. Chilled dough won't stick to surfaces (or cookie cutters) and will keep its shape when baked.
- ❖ Roll the dough to an even thickness so that the cookies will bake in the same amount of time.
- ❖ Lightly flour the sharp edge of your cookie cutters to prevent the dough shapes from sticking to the cutter.

Royal icing

Royal icing, which hardens to a glossy, smooth finish, is ideal for decorating cookies. It can be made with raw egg whites or with meringue powder (egg whites that have been heated to kill bacteria, dried, and powdered; also called powdered egg whites). Since raw egg whites can, in very rare instances, contain salmonella, the powder is the safest choice. Both recipes make a fairly stiff mixture that's ideal for piping with a decorating tip. After outlining, the icing can be thinned slightly with water to make icing "paint" for filling in the outlines with a brush. For sources for meringue powder and colored food pastes, see *Where to Buy It*, p. 86.

Royal Icing with Egg Whites

Yields about 3 cups.

1 pound (4¼ cups) confectioners' sugar, sifted
3 large egg whites
½ teaspoon cream of tartar

Royal Icing with Meringue Powder

Yields about 3 cups.

1 pound (4¼ cups) confectioners' sugar, sifted
3 tablespoons meringue powder
6 tablespoons warm water

To prepare either recipe, combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix (with a hand mixer or a stand mixer) on low speed until blended. Increase to medium speed and beat until the icing holds thick, soft peaks, 4 to 6 minutes. Test the icing for outline consistency by piping a small amount through a decorative tip. If it tends to curl back or is difficult to pipe out, the icing is too dry and needs a few drops of water. Conversely, if the piped icing seems runny, add confectioners' sugar, a tablespoon at a time, beating on low speed to blend. Don't overbeat or the icing will stiffen and lose its gloss. Divide the icing among clean containers, one for each color to be used. Tint as desired with concentrated food coloring pastes or powders (liquid colors can thin the icing too much). Add each color by dipping a toothpick into the paste and transferring small amounts to the icing; stir with a spoon until no streaks remain. Keep the containers sealed when not using them.

Decorating tips

To outline designs, pipe the icing through a pastry bag fitted with a #1 or #2 decorating tip. Hold the bag in your writing hand at a 45-degree angle, touch the tip to the surface of the cookie, and squeeze gently. As the icing begins to come out, raise the tip off the cookie a bit and let the line fall into



Let the icing outline "fall" into place

place. To finish a line, stop squeezing the bag and touch the tip back to the surface. To make raised dots, hold the bag at a 90-degree angle and squeeze. Allow outlines to dry at least 1 hour before filling in areas with icing paint.

When finished with outlining, icing in the pastry bag can be returned to its container and used to make icing paint. Simply add

Fill in large areas with a small artist's brush



water, a drop or two at a time, until the icing has the consistency of thick house paint. Be careful not to thin it too much. Using a small artist's brush, fill in any large areas with icing paint. For small areas, a pastry bag with a tip is best.

Royal icing can be used as glue for cookie decorations, including sparkles, gold and silver dragées, and colored sugars. With a pastry bag or brush, apply royal icing to the cookie and attach the decora-

tion to the wet icing. Let dry completely. Colored sugars look best when the icing is tinted the same color as the sugar.

To get a smooth surface with designs on a background color use the "wet-on-wet" technique: Apply a base coat of thick icing paint and while it's still wet, pipe designs on top; they will fuse with the base coat but keep their shape. Dots can be modified to form hearts, shamrocks, and stars; dots can also be marbled by pulling the tip of a toothpick through all or part of the dot.

Decorated cookies should be dried on racks for at least six hours.

If you want to redo a decoration, wipe off the area with a slightly damp paper towel. If the icing has already dried, it can be gently scraped off with a small knife.

It's best to store cookies decorated with royal icing in airtight containers at a cool room temperature (freezing can cause the icing to separate from the cookie).

Marbleize dots by pulling with a toothpick



Cookies will keep for two to six weeks, depending on how much fat and moisture is in the dough; the leaner and drier the cookie, the longer it will keep. Layer decorated cookies between sheets of waxed paper to keep designs clean.

Frozen puff pastry is one prepared product that really delivers both convenience and quality. You may not get the same buttery flavor of homemade, but you'll get a fantastic flaky texture. The recipes here would be a few hours of work if you were making your own pastry, but take just minutes with frozen.

Sesame Parmesan Twists

Yields 56 five-inch twists.

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (about 2½ oz.) finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (1-oz. jar) sesame seeds, lightly toasted**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. cayenne**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. chili powder**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. dried thyme leaves, crumbled**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt**
- 2 sheets (about 18 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- 1 egg, beaten with a few drops water and a pinch of salt**

tip

❖ If you want to make these more than 2 hours ahead, store them in an airtight container.

Heat the oven to 425°F. In a small bowl, mix together the Parmigiano, sesame seeds, cayenne, chili powder, thyme, and salt. On a lightly floured surface, roll one of the pastry sheets to

a 10x14-inch rectangle. Brush evenly with the egg wash and cut in half lengthwise to make two 5x14-inch strips. Distribute half of the cheese filling over one strip and lay the second strip on top, egg wash side down. Press the strips together with the rolling pin to fuse the two sheets. Cut the strip crosswise into 28 strips $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. Lift a strip, twist it three times, and lay it on an ungreased baking sheet, pressing each end to keep the twists from unwinding during baking. Repeat with the second pastry sheet and the remaining filling.

Bake the twists until they're puffed, light brown, and dry looking throughout, 12 to 14 minutes. Test one by biting it to make sure it isn't doughy in the center.

Let the twists cool on a rack and serve as soon as they're cool, or within a couple of hours if possible.

Ham, Gruyère & Honey-Mustard Palmiers

Yields about 44 palmiers.

- 1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- 2 Tbs. honey Dijon mustard**
- 3 oz. (about 1 cup) shredded Gruyère**

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (about 1 oz.) finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano**
- 4 oz. very thinly sliced baked ham**

Heat the oven to 425°F. On a lightly floured work surface, roll the pastry to a 10x14-inch rectangle. Using the back of a spoon, spread the pastry evenly with the mustard. Sprinkle on the Gruyère and Parmigiano in an even layer.

Arrange the ham in a single, even layer, tearing or cutting pieces to fit. Lay a piece of parchment or waxed paper on top and gently roll and press with the rolling pin to compress the layers. Gently peel off the paper without disturbing the ham.

Cut the rectangle in half widthwise to make two 10x7-inch bands. Gently roll one long edge of a band into the center and then roll the opposite edge in so the two rolls meet in the middle and resemble a double scroll. Press lightly to stick the two rolls together. Repeat with the second band. (The rolls can be assembled to this point and held in the refrigerator for several hours.)

With a very sharp knife, slice each band into about 22 pieces, just under $\frac{1}{2}$ inch each. Arrange the palmiers on two parchment-lined or nonstick baking sheets and bake

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

Tips for working with frozen puff pastry

We developed and tested all these recipes using Pepperidge Farms Puff Pastry Sheets, which seems to be the most widely available brand.

- ❖ The package's recommended thawing time of 20 minutes never seems like enough, so depending on the temperature of your kitchen, allow at least 30 to 45 minutes. The sheet should be very pliable, like a thick sheet of modeling clay.
- ❖ If any moisture beads up on the sheet during thawing, blot it with a paper towel before rolling.
- ❖ Sometimes cracks appear along the seams where the dough was folded. Before rolling and shaping, press the dough together to mend any weak spots, as shown at right.
- ❖ Use enough flour to prevent the dough from sticking to your work surface, but brush off the excess before you fill and shape the dough.



❖ In some recipes, you want the flakiness of puff pastry but not the puff. To reduce puff, it's important to prick the dough all over. Use a fork with sharp tines and cover the surface of the dough completely, as shown at left.

❖ Be sure to bake the dough thoroughly so it's crisp and flaky and no longer doughy in the center. Use the recipe cooking times as guidelines and then use your own judgment.

come a purée). Empty the workbowl, pulse the remaining mushrooms, and combine with the other mushrooms. (You can also do this by chopping everything finely with a knife.)

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium high, add the mushroom mixture and salt, and sauté until all of the mushrooms' liquid has been released and evaporated completely, 8 to 10 minutes; the mixture should start to brown and stick around the edges. Season with the hot sauce. Remove from the heat, stir in the sun-dried tomatoes and Parmigiano; taste and adjust the seasonings.

Spread the filling on a plate and chill in the freezer while you prepare the pastry.

Lightly flour your work surface and roll the pastry sheet to a 10x15-inch rectangle. Prick the dough all over (see the photo at right) and then cut it into four long strips, each 2½ inches wide. Cut each of these strips into six equal pieces, to yield a total of twenty-four 2½-inch squares.

Put a heaping teaspoon of the filling in the center of each square. Dab each corner with a little of the beaten egg and then bring all four corners up to the center and pinch well to fuse them together. You should have little square pouches, with some of the mushroom filling showing. If you have any egg left, you can brush it on the exteriors of the pockets.

Arrange the pockets on a parchment-lined or nonstick baking sheet and bake until they're puffed and deep golden on the sides and bottom and the pastry is no longer doughy, 15 to 16 minutes. Let them cool on a rack for a few minutes and serve warm.

until deep golden brown and no longer doughy in the center (break one open to be sure), 10 to 12 minutes. Be careful not to burn the bottoms. Let cool on a rack and serve just slightly warm or within an hour if possible.

Mushroom & Sun-Dried Tomato Pockets

Yields 24 pockets.

- 1 small shallot or ¼ medium onion (about 1 oz. total)**
- 10 oz. cremini or white mushrooms, rinsed and dried; stems trimmed off**
- 1 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- Few shakes hot sauce (like Tabasco)**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained**
- ¼ cup (about 1 oz.) finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano**
- 1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- 1 egg, beaten**

Heat the oven to 425°F. Put the shallot or onion in a food processor and pulse until finely chopped. Add half of the mushrooms and pulse until very finely chopped (don't over-process or the mushrooms will be-



Honey-Spice Walnut Tart

Yields two 15x5-inch tarts; serves eight to ten.

4 Tbs. unsalted butter, slightly softened
⅓ cup honey
2 Tbs. granulated sugar
1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. ground ginger
Pinch salt
1 large egg
1 cup roughly chopped walnuts
1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed

Heat the oven to 400°F. In a food processor or with a wooden spoon, blend the

butter, honey, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and salt until smooth. Add the egg and process or beat just until blended. Add the nuts all at once and process only until blended. The nuts should be chopped, but not so fine that the mixture becomes a smooth paste; you want some crunch left.

Cut the pastry sheet in half to make two strips about 9x4 inches. Roll one strip to 15x6 inches. Prick the entire

surface of the strip with the tines of a fork (see the photo in "Tips"). Slide the sheet onto a parchment-lined or nonstick baking

sheet. Spread the center of the strip with half of the nut mixture, to within ½ inch of the long edges and all the way to the edge on the short ends. Fold the bare long edges ½ inch over the nut mixture and press firmly to stick; with the blunt edge of a table knife, make indentations into the long edges about ½ inch apart to crimp the border a bit.

Repeat with the second pastry strip and the rest of the nut mixture.

Bake in the heated oven until the filling looks slightly dry on top and the pastry is deep golden brown on the edges and underneath, 19 to 21 minutes. Slide the tarts onto a rack to cool. Cut into four or five strips each and serve slightly warm.

tip

❖ You can make this tart several hours ahead and reheat it in a 400°F oven for a couple of minutes to freshen it up before serving.



Apple Galette with Ginger Glaze

Yields one 11-inch round galette; serves eight to ten.

1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed
2 Granny Smith apples, cored and thinly sliced (no more than ⅛ inch thick)
1 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
2 Tbs. granulated sugar
2 Tbs. apricot jam
1 Tbs. water
1½ Tbs. finely chopped fresh ginger
Pinch salt

Heat the oven to 425°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to a 13-inch square. Trim off the corners to make a rough circle—it doesn't need to be perfect.

Slide the dough circle onto a parchment-lined or nonstick baking sheet. Prick the dough all over (see the photo in "Tips"). Arrange the apples in neat concentric circles, just barely overlapping the slices,

leaving about a 1-inch border of pastry. Dot the apples with the butter and sprinkle with the sugar.

Fold the pastry edges up over the apples to make a 1-inch border. Bake until the dough is medium brown at the edges and underneath and the edges of the apples just begin to brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Slide onto a cooling rack.

As the galette cools, put the jam, water, ginger, and salt in a small saucepan over low heat (or in a glass bowl in the microwave) and heat gently until it just starts to bubble. Stir to blend and remove from the heat. Strain the jam glaze to remove the ginger pieces, or just push the ginger aside. With a pastry brush or a small spoon, lightly glaze the apples and the pastry edge. Serve the galette hot or warm.



Chocolate-Cream Raspberry Napoleons with Chocolate Sauce

Yields 8 napoleons. Note: you'll need a baking sheet that's at least 13x14 inches.

- 1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- 7 oz. semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, broken into small pieces or chopped**
- 1 pint whipping cream**
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- ½ tsp. kosher salt**
- 2 pints fresh raspberries (you'll need at least 48 berries)**
- ⅓ cup confectioners' sugar for sprinkling (optional)**

Heat the oven to 425°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the pastry to a 13x14-inch rectangle. Prick the pastry all over (see the photo on "Tips"). Put the pastry on a baking sheet (lay a sheet of parchment on top if you have any) and lay a cooling rack or another heavy baking sheet on top so that it's perfectly flat on the pastry and there are no gaps between the layer of pastry and the rack or sheet on top. Bake until the pastry is very deep golden brown all over, 15 to 25 minutes; it shouldn't puff at all except possibly around the edges a bit. Remove the rack and parchment, slide the pastry off the sheet, and let cool on a rack.

Meanwhile, put the chocolate in a stainless-steel bowl set over a saucepan half-full of water. Bring the water to a bare simmer and melt the chocolate. Remove the bowl from the heat. In one pour, add ⅔ cup of the cream. With a whisk or a rubber spatula,

gently stir until the mixture is smooth and glossy (it will look curdled at first). Stir in the vanilla and salt. Pour ¾ cup of the chocolate mixture into a measuring cup and reserve it as the sauce.

Whip the remaining 1⅓ cups cream until it forms soft peaks and then slowly pour in the remaining chocolate mixture (you should have about ¼ cup) while continuing to beat. Stop when the cream just holds firm peaks; don't overbeat or the cream will look and feel lumpy.

When the pastry is cool, using a sharp knife, trim the edges all around to make an even 12-inch square. Cut the square into sixteen 3-inch squares. Put eight pieces on eight dessert plates. Sift the confectioners' sugar, if using, over the remaining pieces. Spoon a generous ⅓ cup of the chocolate cream onto each bottom piece and arrange the raspberries in three neat rows on top. Top with the remaining pastry pieces. Loosen the chocolate sauce to a flowing consistency by stirring in a few tablespoons of very hot water. Drizzle the chocolate sauce in a zigzag pattern over each napoleon and serve, passing more sauce at the table.

You'll have a lot of chocolate sauce left over; refrigerate it for up to two weeks or freeze it for up to two months.



Brown Sugar & Brandy Pear Turnovers

Yields 4 turnovers.

- 2 Tbs. chopped dried cranberries**
- 2 Tbs. brandy or Cognac**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 Tbs. packed dark brown sugar**
- 1 lb. ripe pears (like Anjou, Comice, or Bartlett), cut into ½-inch chunks**
- Pinch salt**
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**
- 1 sheet (about 9 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed**
- 2 Tbs. heavy cream (optional)**

Heat the oven to 425°F. Put the cranberries and brandy or Cognac in a small bowl and let soak while you prepare the other ingredients. Melt the butter in a wide, heavy-based skillet over medium-high heat. Add the brown sugar and cook, stirring, until the mixture is bubbly, about 2 minutes. Add the pears and salt. Continue cooking over medium-high heat until most of the pears' liquid has been released and cooked off, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the cranberries and brandy and keep cooking and stirring until the pears are just surrounded by a syrupy glaze, about another 3 minutes. Add the lemon juice and stir to blend. Spread the filling in a thin layer on a plate or baking dish and chill in the freezer while you roll the dough.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to a 12-inch square and cut it into four even squares. Put one-quarter of the filling into the center of a square, dab the edges of the dough lightly with water, fold over to make a triangle, and press the edges together very firmly to seal. Transfer to a parchment-lined or nonstick baking sheet. Repeat with the other three turnovers. Cut three 1-inch slashes in each turnover for steam to vent. Brush the tops of the turnovers with the cream, if using. Bake until they're deep golden brown on the top and bottom and the pastry no longer seems doughy in the center, 18 to 22 minutes. Let them cool for a few minutes and then serve warm.